PRACTICAL PIETY;

OR,

THE INFLUENCE

OF THE

RELIGION OF THE HEART

ON THE

CONDUCT OF THE LIFE.

By HANNAH MORE.

The Fear of God begins with the Heart, and purifies and rectifies that; and from the Heart, thus formed, grows a conformity in the Life, the Words, and the Actions.

Sir Matthew Hale's Contemplations.

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PREFACE.

AN eminent Profeſſor of our own time modeſtly declared that he taught chemiſtry in order that he might learn it. The writer of the following pages might, with far more juſtice, offer a ſimilar declaration, as an apology for ſo repeatedly treating on the important topics of religion and morals.

Abaſhed by the equitable precept,

Let thoſe teach others who themſelves excel—

ſhe is aware, how fairly ſhe is putting it in the power of the reader, to aſk, in the ſearching words of an eminent old Prelate, "They that ſpeak thus and adviſe thus, do they do thus?" She can defend herſelf in no other way, than by adopting for a reply the words of the ſame venerable Divine, which immediately follow—"O that it were not too true. Yet although it be but

little that is attained, the very aim is right, and ſomething there is that is done by it. It is better to have ſuch thoughts and deſires, than altogether to give them up; and the very deſire, if it be ſerious and ſincere, may ſo much change the habitude of the ſoul and life, that it is not to be deſpiſed."

The world does not require ſo much to be informed as reminded. A remembrancer may be almoſt as uſeful as an inſtructor; if his office be more humble, it is ſcarcely leſs neceſſary. The man whoſe employment it was, ſtatedly to proclaim in the ear of Philip, REMEMBER THAT THOU ART MORTAL, had his plain admonition been allowed to make its due impreſſion, might have produced a more ſalutary effect on the royal Uſurper, than the impaſſioned orations of his immortal aſſailant —

> whoſe reſiſtleſs eloquence
> Shook th' arſenal, and fulmined over Greece,
> To Macedon and Artaxerxes' throne.

While the orator boldly ſtrove to check the ambition, and arreſt the injuſtice of the King,

King, the ſimple herald barely reminded him, how ſhort would be the reign of injuſtice, how inevitable and how near was the final period of ambition. Let it be remembered to the credit of the Monarch, that while the thunders of the Politician were intolerable, the Monitor was of his own appointment.

This ſlight ſketch, for it pretends to no higher name, aims only at being plain and practical. Contending ſolely for thoſe indiſpenſable points, which, by involving preſent duty, involve future happineſs, the Writer has avoided, as far as Chriſtian ſincerity permits, all controverted topics; has ſhunned whatever might lead to diſputation rather than to profit.

We live in an age, when, as Mr. Pope obſerved of that in which he wrote, it is criminal to be moderate. Would it could not be ſaid that Religion has her parties as well as Politics! Thoſe who endeavour to ſteer clear of all extremes in either, are in danger of being reprobated by both. It is

rather a hardſhip for perſons, who having conſidered it as a Chriſtian duty to cultivate a ſpirit of moderation in thinking, and of candor in judging, that, when theſe diſpoſitions are brought into action, they frequently incur a harſher cenſure, than the errors which it was their chief aim to avoid.

Perhaps, therefore, to that human wiſdom whoſe leading object is human applauſe, it might anſwer beſt to be excluſively attached to ſome one party. On the protection of that party at leaſt, it might in that caſe reckon; and it would then have the diſlike of the oppoſite claſs alone to contend againſt; while thoſe who cannot go all lengths with either, can hardly eſcape the diſapprobation of both.

To apply the remark to the preſent caſe.—The Author is apprehenſive that ſhe may be at once cenſured by oppoſite claſſes of readers as being too ſtrict, and too relaxed,—too much attached to opinions, and too indifferent about them;—as having narrowed the broad field of Chriſtianity by labouring

bouring to eſtabliſh its peculiar doctrines;—as having broken down its incloſures by not confining herſelf to doctrines excluſively;—as having conſidered morality of too little importance, as having raiſed it to an undue elevation;—as having made practice every thing;—as having made it nothing.

While a Catholic ſpirit is accuſed of being latitudinarian in one party, it really *is* ſo in another. In one, it exhibits the character of Chriſtianity on her own grand but correct ſcale; in the other it is the offspring of that indifference, which, conſidering all opinions as of nearly the ſame value, indemnifies itſelf for tolerating all, by not attaching itſelf to any; which, eſtabliſhing a ſelf complacent notion of general benevolence, with a view to diſcredit the narrow ſpirit of Chriſtianity, and adopting a diſplay of that cheap material, liberal ſentiment, as oppoſed to religious ſtrictneſs, ſacrifices true piety to falſe candor.

Chriſtianity may be ſaid to ſuffer between two criminals, but it is difficult to determine by which ſhe ſuffers moſt;—whether by that uncharitable

uncharitable bigotry which diſguiſes her divine character, and ſpeculatively adopts the faggot and the flames of inquiſitorial intolerance; or by that indiſcriminate candor, that conceding ſlackneſs, which, by ſtripping her of her appropriate attributes, reduces her to ſomething ſcarcely worth contending for; to ſomething which, inſtead of making her the religion of Chriſt, generalizes her into any religion which may chuſe to adopt her.—The one diſtorts her lovely lineaments into caricature, and throws her graceful figure into gloomy ſhadow, the other, by daubing her over with colours not her own, renders her form indiſtinct, and obliterates her features. In the firſt inſtance, ſhe excites little affection; in the latter, ſhe is not recognized.

The Writer has endeavoured to addreſs herſelf as a Chriſtian who muſt die ſoon, to Chriſtians who muſt die certainly. She truſts that ſhe ſhall not be accuſed of erecting herſelf into a cenſor, but be conſidered as one who writes with a real conſciouſneſs

that

that ſhe is far from having reached the attainments ſhe ſuggeſts; with a heartfelt conviction of the danger of holding out a ſtandard too likely to diſcredit her own practice. She writes not with the aſſumption of ſuperiority, but with a deep practical ſenſe of the infirmities againſt which ſhe has preſumed to caution others. She wiſhes to be underſtood as ſpeaking the language of ſympathy, rather than of dictation, of feeling rather than of document. So far from fancying herſelf exempt from the evils on which ſhe has animadverted, her very feeling of thoſe evils has aſſiſted her in their delineation. Thus this interior ſentiment of her own deficiencies, which might be urged as a diſqualification, has, ſhe truſts, enabled her to point out dangers to others.—If the patient cannot lay down rules for the cure of a reigning diſeaſe, much leſs effect the cure; yet from the ſymptoms common to the ſame malady, he who labours under it may ſuggeſt the neceſſity of attending to it. He

may

may treat the caſe feelingly, if not ſcientifically. He may ſubſtitute experience, in default of ſkill: he may inſiſt on the value of the remedy he has neglected, as well as recommend that from which he has found benefit.

The ſubjects conſidered in theſe Volumes have been animadverted on, have been in a manner exhauſted, by perſons before whoſe names the Author bows down with the deepeſt humility; by able profeſſional inſtructors, by piety adorned with all the graces of ſtyle, and invigorated with all the powers of argument.

Why then, it may be aſked, multiply books which may rather incumber the Reader than ſtrengthen the cauſe?—"That the old is better" cannot be diſputed. But is not the being "old" ſometimes a reaſon why the being "better" is not regarded? Novelty itſelf is an attraction which but too often ſuperſedes merit. A ſlighter drapery, if it be a new one, may excite a degree of atten-

attention to an object, not paid to it when clad in a richer garb to which the eye has been accuſtomed.

The Author may begin to aſk with one of her earlieſt and moſt enlightened friends *— "Where is the world into which we were born?" Death has broken moſt of thoſe connexions which made the honour and the happineſs of her youthful days. Freſh links however have continued to attach her to ſociety. She is ſingularly happy in the affectionate regard of a great number of amiable young perſons, who may peruſe, with additional attention, ſentiments which come recommended to them by the warmth of their own attachment, more than by any claim of merit in the Writer. Is there not ſomething in perſonal knowledge, ſomething in the feelings of endeared acquaintance, which, by that hidden aſſociation, whence ſo much of our undefined pleaſure is derived, if it does not impart new force to old truths, may excite a new intereſt in conſidering truths

* Dr. Johnſon.

which

which are known? Her concern for theſe engaging perſons extends beyond the tranſient period of preſent intercourſe. It would ſhed a ray of brightneſs on her parting hour, if ſhe could hope that any caution here held out, any principle here ſuggeſted, any habit here recommended, might be of uſe to any one of them, when the hand which now guides the pen, can be no longer exerted in their ſervice. This would be remembering their friend in a way which would evince the higheſt affection in them, which would confer the trueſt honour on herſelf.

Barley-Wood, March 1ſt, 18[illegible].

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PRAC-

PRACTICAL PIETY.

CHAP. I.

Chriſtianity an Internal Principle.

CHRISTIANITY bears all the marks of a divine original. It came down from heaven, and its gracious purpoſe is to carry us up thither. Its Author is God. It was foretold from the beginning by prophecies which grew clearer and brighter as they approached the period of their accompliſhment. It was confirmed by miracles which continued till the religion they illuſtrated was eſtabliſhed. It was ratified by the blood of its Author. Its doctrines are pure, ſublime, conſiſtent. Its precepts juſt and holy. Its worſhip is ſpiritual. Its ſervice reaſonable, and rendered practicable by the offers of Divine aid to human weakneſs. It is ſanctioned by the

promiſe of eternal happineſs to the faithful, and the threat of everlaſting miſery to the diſobedient. It had no colluſion with power, for power ſought to cruſh it. It could not be in any league with the world, for it ſet out by declaring itſelf the enemy of the world. It reprobated its maxims, it ſhewed the vanity of its glories, the danger of its riches, the emptineſs of its pleaſures.

Chriſtianity, though the moſt perfect rule of life that ever was deviſed, is far from being barely a rule of life. A religion conſiſting of a mere code of laws might have ſufficed for man in a ſtate of innocence. But man who has broken theſe laws cannot be ſaved by a rule which he has violated. What conſolation could he find in the peruſal of ſtatutes, every one of which, bringing a freſh conviction of his guilt, brings a freſh aſſurance of his condemnation. The chief object of the Goſpel is not to furniſh rules for the preſervation of innocence, but to hold out the means of ſalvation to the guilty. It does not proceed upon a ſuppoſition, but a fact;

a fact; not upon what might have ſuited man in a ſtate of purity, but upon what is ſuitable to him in the exigencies of his fallen ſtate.

This religion does not conſiſt in an external conformity to practices which, though right in themſelves, may be adopted from human motives, and to anſwer ſecular purpoſes. It is not a religion of forms, and modes, and decencies. It is being tranſformed into the image of God. It is being like-minded with Chriſt. It is conſidering him as our ſanctification, as well as our redemption. It is endeavouring to live to him here that we may live with him hereafter. It is deſiring earneſtly to ſurrender our will to his, our heart to the conduct of his ſpirit, our life to the guidance of his word.

The change in the human heart which the Scriptures declare to be neceſſary, they repreſent to be not ſo much an old principle improved as a new one created; not educed out of the former character, but

infuſed into the new one. This change is there expreſſed in great varieties of language, and under different figures of ſpeech. Its being ſo frequently deſcribed, or figuratively intimated in almoſt every part of the volume of inſpiration, entitles the doctrine itſelf to reverence, and ought to ſhield from obloquy the obnoxious terms in which it is ſometimes conveyed.

The ſacred writings frequently point out the analogy between natural and ſpiritual things. The ſame ſpirit which in the creation of the world moved upon the face of the waters, operates on the human character to produce a new heart and a new life. By this operation the affections and faculties of the man receive a new impulſe—his dark underſtanding is illuminated, his rebellious will is ſubdued, his irregular deſires are rectified; his judgment is informed, his imagination is chaſtened, his inclinations are ſanctified; his hopes and fears are directed to their true and adequate end. Heaven becomes the object of his hopes, an eternal

ſeparation

ſeparation from God the object of his fears. His love of the world is tranſmitted into the love of God. The lower faculties are preſſed into the new ſervice. The ſenſes have a higher direction. The whole internal frame and conſtitution receive a nobler bent; the intents and purpoſes of the mind a ſublimer aim; his aſpirations a loftier flight; his vacillating deſires find a fixed object; his vagrant purpoſes a ſettled home; his diſappointed heart a certain refuge. That heart, no longer the worſhipper of the world, is ſtruggling to become its conqueror. Our bleſſed Redeemer, in overcoming the world, bequeathed us his command to overcome it alſo; but as he did not give the command without the example, ſo he did not give the example without the offer of a power to obey the command.

Genuine religion demands not merely an external profeſſion of our allegiance to God, but an inward devotedneſs of ourſelves to his ſervice. It is not a recognition, but a dedication. It puts the Chriſtian into a new

ſtate of things, a new condition of being. It raiſes him above the world while he lives in it. It diſperſes the illuſions of ſenſe, by opening his eyes to realities in the place of thoſe ſhadows which he has been purſuing. It preſents this world as a ſcene whoſe original beauty Sin has darkened and diſordered, Man as a helpleſs and dependent creature, Jeſus Chriſt as the repairer of all the evils which ſin has cauſed, and as our reſtorer to holineſs and happineſs. Any religion ſhort of this, any, at leaſt, which has not this for its end and object, is not that religion which the Goſpel has preſented to us, which our Redeemer came down on earth to teach us by his precepts, to illuſtrate by his example, to confirm by his death, and to conſummate by his reſurrection.

If Chriſtianity do not always produce theſe happy effects to the extent here repreſented, it has always a tendency to produce them. If we do not ſee the progreſs to be ſuch as the Goſpel annexes to the transforming power of true religion, it is not owing to any defect

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in the principle, but to the remains of ſin in the heart; to the imperfectly ſubdued corruptions of the Chriſtian. Thoſe who are very ſincere are ſtill very imperfect. They evidence their ſincerity by acknowledging the lowneſs of their attainments, by lamenting the remainder of their corruptions. Many an humble Chriſtian whom the world reproaches with being extravagant in his zeal, whom it ridicules for being enthuſiaſtic in his aims, and rigid in his practice, is inwardly mourning on the very contrary ground. He would bear their cenſure more cheerfully, but that he feels his danger lies in the oppoſite direction. He is ſecretly abaſing himſelf before his Maker for not carrying far enough that principle which he is accuſed of carrying too far. The fault which others find in him is exceſs. The fault he finds in himſelf is deficiency. He is, alas! too commonly right. His enemies ſpeak of him as they hear. He judges of himſelf as he feels. But, though humbled to the duſt by the deep ſenſe of his own

unworthineſs, he is "ſtrong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." "He has," ſays the venerable Hooker, "a ſhepherd full of kindneſs, full of care, and full of power." His prayer is not for reward but pardon. His plea is not merit but mercy; but then it is mercy made ſure to him by the promiſe of the Almighty to penitent believers.

The miſtake of many in religion appears to be, that they do not begin with the beginning. They do not lay their foundation in the perſuaſion that man is by nature in a ſtate of alienation from God. They conſider him rather as an imperfect than as a fallen creature. They allow that he requires to be improved, but deny that he requires a thorough renovation of heart.

But genuine Chriſtianity can never be grafted on any other ſtock than the apoſtacy of man. The deſign to re-inſtate beings who have not fallen; to propoſe a reſtoration without a previous loſs, a cure where there was no radical diſeaſe, is altogether an incon-

incongruity which would ſeem too palpable to require confutation, did we not ſo frequently ſee the doctrine of redemption maintained by thoſe who deny that man was in a ſtate to require ſuch a redemption. But would Chriſt have been ſent "to preach deliverance to the captive," if there had been no captivity; and "the opening of the priſon to them that were bound," had there been no priſon, had men been in no bondage?

We are aware that many conſider the doctrine in queſtion as a bold charge againſt our Creator. But may we not venture to aſk, Is it not a bolder charge againſt God's goodneſs to preſume that he had made beings originally wicked, and againſt God's veracity to believe, that having made ſuch beings he pronounced them "good?" Is not that doctrine more reaſonable which is expreſſed or implied in every part of Scripture, that the moral corruption of our firſt parent has been entailed on his whole poſterity; that from this corruption

they are no more exempt than from natural death?

We muſt not, however, think falſely of our nature; we muſt humble but not degrade it. Our original brightneſs is obſcured, but not extinguiſhed. If we conſider ourſelves in our natural ſtate, our eſtimation cannot be too low; when we reflect at what a price we have been bought, we can hardly over-rate ourſelves in the view of immortality.

If, indeed, the Almighty had left us to the conſequences of our natural ſtate, we might, with more colour of reaſon, have mutinied againſt his juſtice. But when we ſee how graciouſly he has turned our very lapſe into an occaſion of improving our condition; how from this evil he was pleaſed to advance us to a greater good than we had loſt; how that life which was forfeited may be reſtored; how, by grafting the redemption of man on the very circumſtance of his fall, he has raiſed him to the capacity of a higher condition than that which he has forfeited,

feited, and to a happineſs ſuperior to that from which he fell—What an impreſſion does this give us of the immeaſurable wiſdom and goodneſs of God, of the unſearchable riches of Chriſt!

The religion which it is the object of theſe pages to recommend, has been ſometimes miſunderſtood, and not ſeldom miſrepreſented. It has been deſcribed as an unproductive theory, and ridiculed as a fanciful extravagance. For the ſake of diſtinction it is here called, *The Religion of the heart.* *There* it ſubſiſts as the fountain of Spiritual life; *thence* it ſends forth, as from the central ſeat of its exiſtence, ſupplies of life and warmth through the whole frame; *there* is the ſoul of virtue, *there* is the vital principle which animates the whole being of a Chriſtian.

This religion has been the ſupport and conſolation of the [illegible] believer in all ages of the Church. That it has been perverted both by the cloyſtered and the un-cloyſtered myſtic, not merely to promote ab-

ſtraction of mind, but inactivity of life, makes nothing againſt the principle itſelf. What doctrine of the New Teſtament has not been made to ſpeak the language of its injudicious advocate, and turned into arms againſt ſome other doctrine which it was never meant to oppoſe?

But if it has been carried to a blameable exceſs by the pious error of holy men, it has alſo been adopted by the leſs innocent fanatic, and abuſed to the moſt pernicious purpoſes. His extravagance has furniſhed to the enemies of internal religion, arguments, or rather invectives, againſt the ſound and ſober exerciſes of genuine piety. They ſeize every occaſion to repreſent it as if it were criminal, as the foe of morality; ridiculous, as the infallible teſt of an unſound mind; miſchievous, as hoſtile to active virtue, and deſtructive as the bane of public utility.

But if theſe charges be really well founded, then were the brighteſt luminaries of the Chriſtian Church—then were Horne, and Porteus,

Porteus, and Beveridge; then were Hooker, and Taylor, and Herbert; Hopkins, Leighton, and Uſher; Howe, Doddridge, and Baxter; Ridley, Jewell, and Hooper; — then were Chryſoſtome, and Auguſtine, the Reformers and the Fathers; then were the goodly fellowſhip of the Prophets, then were the noble army of Martyrs, then were the glorious company of the Apoſtles, then was the Diſciple whom Jeſus loved, then was Jeſus himſelf — I ſhudder at the implication — dry ſpeculatiſts, frantic enthuſiaſts, enemies to virtue, and ſubverters of the public weal.

Thoſe who diſbelieve, or deride, or reject this inward religion, are much to be compaſſionated. Their belief that no ſuch principle exiſts, will, it is to be feared, effectually prevent its exiſting in themſelves, at leaſt, while they make their own ſtate the meaſure of their general judgment. Not being ſenſible of the required diſpoſitions, in their own hearts, they eſtabliſh this as a proof of

its impoſſibility in all caſes. This perſuaſion, as long as they maintain it, will aſſuredly exclude the reception of divine truth. What they aſſert can be true in no caſe, cannot be true in their own. Their hearts will be barred againſt any influence in the power of which they do not believe. They will not deſire it; they will not pray for it, except in the Liturgy, *where it is the decided language:* They will not addict themſelves to thoſe pious exerciſes to which it invites them, exerciſes which it ever loves and cheriſhes. Thus they expect the end, but avoid the way which leads to it; they indulge the hope of glory, while they neglect or pervert the means of grace. But let not the formal religioniſt, who has, probably, never ſought, and, therefore, never obtained any ſenſe of the ſpiritual mercies of God, conclude that there is, therefore, no ſuch ſtate. His having no conception of it is no more proof that no ſuch ſtate exiſts, than it is a proof that the cheering beams of a

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genial climate have no exiſtence becauſe the inhabitants of the frozen zone have never felt them.

Where our own heart and experience do not illuſtrate theſe truths practically, ſo as to afford us ſome evidence of their reality, let us examine our minds, and faithfully follow up our convictions; let us enquire whether God has really been wanting in the accompliſhment of his promiſes, or whether we have not been ſadly deficient in yielding to thoſe ſuggeſtions of conſcience which are the motions of his ſpirit? Whether we have not neglected to implore the aids of that Spirit; whether we have not, in various inſtances, reſiſted them? Let us aſk ourſelves—have we looked up to our heavenly father with humble dependence for the ſupplies of his grace? or have we prayed for theſe bleſſings only as a form, and having acquitted ourſelves of the form, do we continue to live as if we had not ſo prayed? Having repeatedly implored his direction, do we endeavour to ſubmit ourſelves to its guidance?

guidance? Having prayed that his will may be done, do we never ſtoutly ſet up our own will in contradiction to his?

If, then, we receive not the promiſed ſupport and comfort, the failure muſt reſt ſomewhere. It lies between him who has promiſed, and him to whom the promiſe is made. There is no other alternative; would it not be blaſphemy to transfer the failure to God? Let us not, then, reſt till we have cleared up the difficulty. The ſpirits ſink, and the faith fails, if, after a continued round of reading and prayer; after having, for years, conformed to the letter of the command; after having ſcrupulouſly brought in our tale of outward duties; we find ourſelves juſt where we were at ſetting out.

We complain juſtly of our own weakneſs, and truly plead our inability as a reaſon why we cannot ſerve God as we ought. This infirmity, its nature, and its meaſure, God knows far more exactly than we know it; yet he knows that, with the help which

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he offers us, we can both love and obey him, or he never would have made it our qualification for heaven. He never would have ſaid, "give me thy heart"—"ſeek ye my face"—"add to your faith virtue"—"have a right heart and a right ſpirit"—"ſtrengthen the things that remain"—"ye will not come to me that ye might have life"—had not all theſe precepts a definite meaning, had not all theſe been practicable duties.

Can we ſuppoſe that the omniſcient God would have given theſe unqualified commands to powerleſs, incapable, unimpreſſible beings? Can we ſuppoſe that he would command paralyzed creatures to walk, and then condemn them for not being able to move? He knows it is true, our natural impotence, but he knows, becauſe he confers, our ſuperinduced ſtrength. There is ſcarcely a command in the whole Scripture which has not either immediately, or in ſome other part, a correſponding prayer, and a correſponding promiſe. If it ſays in one place "*get* thee a new

a new heart" —it ſays in another "a new heart will I *give* thee;" and in a third "*make* me a clean heart." For it is worth obſerving that a diligent enquirer may trace every where this threefold union. If God *commands* by Saint Paul "let not ſin reign in your mortal body," he *promiſes* by the ſame Apoſtle, "Sin ſhall *not* have dominion over you;" — while, to complete the tripartite agreement, he makes David *pray* that his "ſins may not have dominion over him."

The Saints of old, ſo far from ſetting up on the ſtock of their own independent virtue, ſeem to have had no idea of any light but what was imparted, of any ſtrength but what was communicated to them from above. — Hear their importunate petitions! — "O ſend forth thy light and thy truth!" — Mark their grateful declarations! — "The Lord is my ſtrength and my ſalvation!" — Obſerve their cordial acknowledgements! "Bleſs the Lord, O my ſoul, and all that is within me bleſs his holy name."

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Though we muſt be careful not to miſtake for the divine Agency thoſe impulſes which pretend to operate independently of external revelation; which have little reference to it; which ſet themſelves above it; it is, however, that powerful agency which ſanctifies all means, renders all external revelation effectual. —Notwithſtanding that all the truths of religion, all the doctrines of ſalvation, are contained in the Holy Scriptures, theſe very Scriptures require the influence of that Spirit which dictated them to produce an influential faith. This Spirit, by enlightening the mind, converts the rational perſuaſion, brings the intellectual conviction of divine truth conveyed in the New Teſtament, into an operative principle. A man, from reading, examining, and enquiring, may attain to ſuch a reaſonable aſſurance of the truth of revelation as will remove all doubts from his own mind, and even enable him to refute the objections of others; but this bare intellectual faith alone will not operate againſt his corrupt affections, will not cure his beſetting

ſetting ſin, will not conquer his rebellious will, and may not therefore be an efficacious principle. A mere hiſtorical faith, the mere evidence of facts with the ſoundeſt reaſonings and deductions from them, may not be that faith which will fill him with all joy and peace in believing.

An habitual reference to that Spirit which animates the real Chriſtian is ſo far from excluding, that it ſtrengthens the truth of revelation, but never contradicts it. The word of God is always in uniſon with his ſpirit. His ſpirit is never in oppoſition to his word. Indeed that this influence is not an imaginary thing is confirmed by the whole tenor of Scripture. We are aware that we are treading on dangerous, becauſe diſputed ground; for among the faſhionable curtailments of Scripture doctrines, there is not one truth which has been lopped from the modern creed with a more unſparing hand; not one, the defence of which excites more ſuſpicion againſt its advocates. But if it had been a mere phantom, ſhould we with ſuch

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jealous iteration, have been cautioned againſt neglecting or oppoſing it? If the holy Spirit could not be "grieved," might not be "quenched," were not likely to be "reſiſted;" that very ſpirit which proclaimed the prohibitions would never have ſaid "grieve not," "quench not," "reſiſt not." The Bible never warns us againſt imaginary evil, nor courts us to imaginary good. If then we refuſe to yield to its guidance, if we reject its directions, if we ſubmit not to its gentle perſuaſions, for ſuch they are, and not arbitrary compulſions, we ſhall never attain to that peace and liberty which are the privilege, the promiſed reward of ſincere Chriſtians.

In ſpeaking of that peace which paſſeth underſtanding, we allude not to thoſe illuminations and raptures, which, if God has in ſome inſtances beſtowed them, he has no where pledged himſelf to beſtow: but of that rational yet elevated hope which flows from an aſſured perſuaſion of the paternal love of our heavenly Father; of that "ſecret

of the Lord," which he himſelf has aſſured us, "is with them that fear him;" of that life and power of religion which are the privilege of thoſe "who abide under the ſhadow of the Almighty;" of thoſe who "know in whom they have believed;" of thoſe "who walk not after the fleſh but after the ſpirit;" of thoſe "who endure as ſeeing him who is inviſible."

Some people reaſon as if it were the object of divine influences to blind and not to enlighten, to miſlead and not to guide, to create confuſion, not regularity, eccentricity, not order; while the oppoſite claſs actually convert this ſacred agency into a diſorderly principle. It is eaſy to talk of religion without this divine aid, but impoſſible to produce it. In the oppoſite caſe, it is not difficult to inflame the imagination, but it is very difficult to reform the heart.

Many faults may be committed where there is nevertheleſs a ſincere deſire to pleaſe God. Many infirmities are conſiſtent with a cordial love of our Redeemer. Faith

CHAP. II.

Chriſtianity a Practical Principle.

IF God be the Author of our ſpiritual life, the root from which we derive the vital principle, with daily ſupplies to maintain this vitality, then the beſt evidence we can give that we have received ſomething of this principle, is an unreſerved dedication of ourſelves to the actual promotion of his glory. No man ought to flatter himſelf that he is in the favour of God, whoſe life is not conſecrated to the ſervice of God. Will it not be the only unequivocal proof of ſuch a conſecration, that he be more zealous of good works than thoſe who, diſallowing the principle on which he performs them, do not even pretend to be actuated by any ſuch motive?

The fineſt theory never yet carried any man to Heaven. A Religion of notions

which occupies the mind, without filling the heart, may obſtruct, but cannot advance the ſalvation of men. If theſe notions are falſe, they are moſt pernicious; if true and not operative, they aggravate guilt; if unimportant though not unjuſt, they occupy the place which belongs to nobler objects, and ſink the mind below its proper level; ſubſtituting the things which only ought not to be left undone, in the place of thoſe which ought to be done; and cauſing the grand eſſentials not to be done at all. Such a religion is not that which Chriſt came to teach mankind.

All the doctrines of the Goſpel are practical principles. The word of God was not written, the Son of God was not incarnate, the Spirit of God was not given, only that Chriſtians might obtain right views, and poſſeſs juſt notions. Religion is ſomething more than mere correctneſs of intellect, juſtneſs of conception, and exactneſs of judgment. It is a life-giving principle. It muſt be infuſed into the habit, as well as govern

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in the underſtanding; it muſt regulate the will as well as direct the creed. It muſt not only caſt the opinions into a right frame, but the heart into a new mould. It is a transforming as well as a penetrating principle. It changes the taſtes, gives activity to the inclinations, and, together with a new heart, produces a new life.

Chriſtianity enjoins the ſame temper, the ſame ſpirit, the ſame diſpoſitions on all its real profeſſors. The act, the performance, muſt depend on circumſtances which do not depend on us. The power of doing good is withheld from many, from whom, however, the reward will not be withheld. If the external act conſtituted the whole value of Chriſtan virtue, then muſt the Author of all good be himſelf the Author of injuſtice, by putting it out of the power of multitudes to fulfil his own commands. In principles, in tempers, in fervent deſires, in holy endeavours, conſiſts the very eſſence of Chriſtian duty.

Nor muſt we fondly attach ourſelves to the practice of ſome particular virtue, or

value ourſelves excluſively on ſome favourite quality; nor muſt we wrap ourſelves up in the performance of ſome individual actions as if they formed the ſum of Chriſtian duty. But we muſt embrace the whole law of God in all its aſpects, bearings, and relations. We muſt bring no fancies, no partialities, no prejudices, no excluſive choice or rejection, into our religion, but take it as we find it, and obey it as we receive it, as it is exhibited in the Bible without addition, curtailment, or adulteration.

Nor muſt we pronounce on a character by a ſingle action really bad, or apparently good; if ſo, Peter's denial would render him the object of our execration, while we ſhould have judged favourably of the prudent economy of Judas. The cataſtrophe of the latter who does not know? while the other became a glorious martyr to that Maſter whom, in a moment of infirmity, he had denied.

A Piety altogether ſpiritual, diſconnected with all outward circumſtances; a religion

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of pure meditation, and abſtracted devotion, was not made for ſo compound, ſo imperfect a creature as man. There have, indeed, been a few ſublime ſpirits, not "touch'd but rap't," who, totally cut off from the world, ſeem almoſt to have literally ſoared above this terrene region; who almoſt appear to have ſtolen the fire of the Seraphim, and to have had no buſineſs on earth, but to keep alive the celeſtial flame. They would, however, have approximated more nearly to the example of their Divine Maſter, the great ſtandard and only perfect model, had they combined a more diligent diſcharge of the active duties and beneficences of life with their high devotional attainments.

But while we are in little danger of imitating, let us not too harſhly cenſure the pious error of theſe ſublimated ſpirits. Their number is ſmall. Their example is not catching. Their etherial fire is not likely, by ſpreading, to inflame the world. The world will take due care not to come in contact with it, while its diſtant light and

warmth may caſt, accidentally, a not unuſeful ray on the cold-hearted and the worldly.

But from this ſmall number of refined but inoperative beings, we do not intend to draw our notions of practical piety. God did not make a religion for theſe few exceptions to the general ſtate of the world, but for the world at large; for beings active, buſy, reſtleſs; whoſe activity he, by his word, diverts into its proper channels; whoſe buſy ſpirit is there directed to the common good; whoſe reſtleſſneſs, indicating the unſatisfactorineſs of all they find on earth, he points to a higher deſtination. Were total ſecluſion and abſtraction deſigned to have been the general ſtate of the world, God would have given men other laws, other rules, other faculties, and other employments.

There is a claſs of viſionary but pious writers, who ſeem to ſhoot as far beyond the mark, as mere moraliſts fall ſhort of it. Men of low views and groſs minds may be

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ſaid to be wiſe *below* what is written, while thoſe of too ſubtile refinement are wiſe *above* it. The one grovel in the duſt from the inertneſs of their intellectual faculties; while the others are loſt in the clouds by ſtretching them beyond their appointed limits. The one build ſpiritual caſtles in the air, inſtead of erecting them on the "holy ground" of Scripture; the other lay their foundation in the ſand inſtead of reſting it on the rock of ages. Thus, the ſuperſtructure of both is equally unſound.

God is the fountain from which ll the ſtreams of goodneſs flow; the centre from which all the rays of bleſſedneſs diverge. All our actions are only good, as they have a reference to him: the ſtreams muſt revert back to their fountain, the rays muſt converge again to their centre.

If love of God be the governing principle, this powerful ſpring will actuate all the movements of the rational machine. The eſſence of religion does not ſo much conſiſt in actions as affections. Though right ac-

tions, therefore, as from an excefs of courtefy, they are commonly termed, may be performed where there are no right affections; yet are they a mere carcafe, utterly deftitute of the foul, and, therefore, of the fubftance of virtue. But neither can affections fubftantially and truly fubfift without producing right actions; for never let it be forgotten that a pious inclination which has not life and vigour fufficient to ripen into act when the occafion prefents itfelf, and a right action which does not grow out of a found principle, will neither of them have any place in the account of real goodnefs. A good inclination will be contrary to fin, but a mere inclination will not fubdue fin.

The love of God, as it is the fource of every right action and feeling, fo is it the only principle which neceffarily involves the love of our fellow-creatures. As man we do not love man. There is a love of partiality but not of benevolence; of fenfibility but not of philanthropy; of friends and favourites, of parties and focieties, but not of

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man collectively. It is true we may, and do, without this principle, relieve his diſtreſſes, but we do not bear with his faults. We may promote his fortune, but we do not forgive his offences; above all, we are not anxious for his immortal intereſts. We could not ſee him want without pain, but we can ſee him ſin without emotion. We could not hear of a beggar periſhing at our door without horror, but we can, without concern, witneſs an acquaintance dying without repentance. Is it not ſtrange that we muſt participate ſomething of the divine nature, before we can really love the human? It ſeems, indeed, to be an inſenſibility to ſin, rather than want of benevolence to mankind, that makes us naturally pity their temporal and be careleſs of their ſpiritual wants; but does not this very inſenſibility proceed from the want of love to God?

As it is the habitual frame, and predominating diſpoſition, which are the true meaſure of virtue, incidental good actions are no certain criterion of the ſtate of the heart;

for who is there, who does not occaſionally do them? Having made ſome progreſs in attaining this diſpoſition, we muſt not ſit down ſatisfied with propenſities and inclinations to virtuous actions, while we reſt ſhort of their actual exerciſe. If the principle be that of ſound Chriſtianity, it will never be inert. While we ſhall never do good with any great effect, till we labour to be conformed, in ſome meaſure, to the image of God; we ſhall beſt evince our having obtained ſomething of that conformity, by a courſe of ſteady and active obedience to God.

Every individual ſhould bear in mind, that he is ſent into this world to act a part in it. And though one may have a more ſplendid, and another a more obſcure part aſſigned him, yet the actor of each is equally, is awfully accountable. Though God is not a hard, he is an exact Maſter. His ſervice, though not a ſevere, is a reaſonable ſervice. He accurately proportions his requiſitions to his gifts. If he does not expect that one talent

talent ſhould be as productive as five, yet to even a ſingle talent a proportionable reſponſibility is annexed.

He who has ſaid "Give me thy heart," will not be ſatisfied with leſs; he will not accept the praying lips, nor the mere hand of Charity, as ſubſtitutes.

A real Chriſtian will be more juſt, ſober, and charitable than other men, though he will not reſt for ſalvation on juſtice, ſobriety, or charity. He will perform the duties they enjoin, in the ſpirit of Chriſtianity, as inſtances of devout obedience, as evidences of a heart devoted to God.

All virtues, it cannot be too often repeated, are ſanctified or unhallowed according to the principle which dictates them; and will be accepted or rejected accordingly. This principle, kept in due exerciſe, becomes a habit, and every act ſtrengthens the inclination, adding vigour to the principle and pleaſure to the performance.

We cannot be ſaid to be real Chriſtians, till religion become our animating motive,

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our predominating principle and purſuit, as much as worldly things are the predominating motive, principle, and purſuit of worldly men.

New converts, it is ſaid, are moſt zealous, but they are not always the moſt perſevering. If their tempers are warm, and they have only been touched on the ſide of their paſſions, they ſtart eagerly, march rapidly, and are full of confidence in their own ſtrength. They too often judge others with little charity, and themſelves with little humility. While they accuſe thoſe who move ſteadily of ſtanding ſtill, they fancy their own courſe will never be ſlackened. If their converſion be not ſolid, religion, in loſing its novelty, loſes its power. Their ſpeed declines. Nay, it will be happy if their motion become not retrograde. Thoſe who are truly ſincere, will commonly be perſevering. If their ſpeed is leſs eager, it is more ſteady. As they know their own heart more, they diſcover its deceitfulneſs, and learn to diſtruſt themſelves. As they become more humble in

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ſpirit they become more charitable in judging. As they grow more firm in principle they grow more exact in conduct.

The rooted habits of a religious life may indeed loſe their prominence, becauſe they are become more indented. If they are not emboſſed it is becauſe they are burnt in. Where there is uniformity and conſiſtency in the whole character, there will be little *relief* in an individual action. A good deed will be leſs ſtriking in an eſtabliſhed Chriſtian than a deed leſs good in one who had been previouſly careleſs; good actions being his expected duty and his ordinary practice. Such a Chriſtian indeed, when his right habits ceaſe to be new and ſtriking, may fear that he is declining: but his quiet and confirmed courſe is a ſurer evidence than the more early ſtarts of charity, or fits of piety, which may have drawn more attention and obtained more applauſe.

Again; we ſhould cultivate moſt aſſiduouſly, becauſe the work is moſt difficult, thoſe graces which are moſt oppoſite to our

natural temper; the value of our good qualities depending much on their being produced by the victory over ſome natural wrong propenſity. The implantation of a virtue is the eradication of a vice. It will coſt one man more to keep down a riſing paſſion than to do a brilliant deed. It will try another more to keep back a ſparkling but corrupt thought, which his wit had ſuggeſted, but which his religion checks, than it would to give a large ſum in charity. A real Chriſtian being deeply ſenſible of the worthleſſneſs of any actions, which do not ſpring from the genuine fountain, will aim at ſuch an habitual conformity to the Divine image, that to perform all acts of juſtice, charity, kindneſs, temperance, and every kindred virtue, may become the temper, the habitual, the abiding ſtate of his heart; that like natural ſtreams they may flow ſpontaneouſly from the living ſource.

Practical Chriſtianity, then, is the actual operation of Chriſtian principles. It is lying on the watch for occaſions to exemplify

them. It is "exerciſing ourſelves unto godlineſs." A Chriſtian cannot tell in the morning what opportunities he may have of doing good during the day; but if he be a real Chriſtian, he can tell that he will try to keep his heart open, his mind prepared, his affections alive to do whatever may occur in the way of duty. He will, as it were, ſtand in the way to receive the orders of Providence. Doing good is his vocation. Nor does the young artiſan bind himſelf by firmer articles to the rigid performance of his maſter's work, than the indentured Chriſtian to the active ſervice of that Divine Maſter who himſelf "went about doing good." He rejects no duty which comes within the ſphere of his calling, nor does he think the work he is employed in a good one, if he might be doing a better. His having well acquitted himſelf of a good action, is ſo far from furniſhing him with an excuſe for avoiding the next, that it is a new reaſon for his embarking in it. He looks not at the work which he has accompliſhed; but

on that which he has to do. His views are always proſpective. His charities are ſcarcely limited by his power. His will knows no limits. His fortune may have bounds. His benevolence has none. He is, in mind and deſire, the benefactor of every miſerable man. His heart is open to all the diſtreſſed; to the houſehold of faith it overflows. Where the heart is large, however ſmall the ability, a thouſand ways of doing good will be invented. Chriſtian charity is a great enlarger of means. Chriſtian ſelf-denial negatively accompliſhes the purpoſe of the favourite of fortune in the fables of the Nurſery:—If it cannot fill the purſe by a wiſh, it will not empty it by a vanity. It provides for others by abridging from itſelf. Having carefully defined what is neceſſary and becoming, it allows of no encroachment on its definition. Superfluities it will lop, vanities it will cut off. The deviſer of liberal things will find means of effecting them, which to the indolent appear incredible, to the covetous impoſſible. Chriſtian bene-

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ficence takes a large ſweep. That circumference cannot be ſmall, of which God is the centre. Nor does religious charity in a Chriſtian ſtand ſtill becauſe not kept in motion by the main ſpring of the world. Money may fail, but benevolence will be going on. If he cannot relieve want, he may mitigate ſorrow. He may warn the inexperienced, he may inſtruct the ignorant, he may confirm the doubting. The Chriſtian will find out the cheapeſt way of *being* good as well as of *doing* good. If he cannot give money, he may exerciſe a more difficult virtue; he may forgive injuries. Forgiveneſs is the economy of the heart. A Chriſtian will find it cheaper to pardon than to reſent. Forgiveneſs ſaves the expence of anger, the coſt of hatred, the waſte of ſpirits. It alſo puts the ſoul into a frame, which makes the practice of other virtues eaſy. The achievement of a hard duty is a great aboliſher of difficulties. If great occaſions do not ariſe, he will thankfully ſeize on ſmall ones. If he cannot glorify God

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by ſerving others, he knows that he has always ſomething to do at home; ſome evil temper to correct, ſome wrong propenſity to reform, ſome crooked practice to ſtraiten. He will never be at a loſs for employment, while there is a ſin or a miſery in the world; he will never be idle, while there is a diſtreſs to be relieved in another, or a corruption to be cured in his own heart. We have employments aſſigned to us for every circumſtance in life. When we are alone, we have our thoughts to watch; in the family, our tempers; in company, our tongues.

It will be a teſt of our ſincerity to our own hearts, and for ſuch teſts we ſhould anxiouſly watch, if we are as aſſiduous in following up our duty when only the favour of God is to be obtained by it, as in caſes where ſubordinate conſiderations are taken into the account; and bring their portion of influence. We muſt therefore conſcientiouſly examine in what ſpirit we fulfil thoſe parts of our duty which lie more excluſively between our Creator and our conſcience.

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Whether we are as ſolicitous about our inward diſpoſition as about the act of which that diſpoſition ſhould be the principle. If our piety be internal and ſincere we ſhall lament an evil temper no leſs than an evil action, conſcious that though in its indulgence we may eſcape human cenſure, yet to the eye of Omniſcience, as both lie equally open, both are equally offenſive.

Without making any fallible human being our infallible guide, and eſtabliſhed ſtandard, let us make uſe of the examples of eminently pious men as incentives to our own growth in every Chriſtian grace. A generous emulation of the excellencies of another is not envy. It is a ſanctification of that noble excitement which ſtirred the ſoul of Themiſtocles, when he declared that the trophies of Miltiades prevented him from ſleeping. The Chriſtian muſt not ſtop here. He muſt imitate the Pagan hero in the *uſe* to which he converted his reſtleſs admiration, which gave him no repoſe till he himſelf became equally illuſtrious by ſervices equally diſtinguiſhed with thoſe of his rival.

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But to the Chriſtian is held out in the ſacred volume not only models of human excellence but of divine perfection, What an example of diſintereſted goodneſs and unbounded kindneſs, have we in our Heavenly Father, who is merciful over all his works, who diſtributes common bleſſings without diſtinction, who beſtows the neceſſary refreſhments of life, the ſhining ſun and the refreſhing ſhower, without waiting, as we are apt to do, for perſonal merit, or attachment, or gratitude; who does not look out for deſert, but want, as a qualification for his favours; who does not afflict willingly, who delights in the happineſs, and deſires the ſalvation of all his children, who diſpenſes his daily munificence, and bears with our daily offences; who in return for our violation of his laws, ſupplies our neceſſities, who waits patiently for our repentance, and even ſolicits us to have mercy on our own ſouls!

What a model for our humble imitation, is that Divine Perſon who was clothed with

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our humanity; who dwelt among us, that the pattern being brought near, might be rendered more engaging, the conformity be made more practicable; whose whole life was one unbroken series of universal charity; who, in his complicated bounties, never forgot that man is compounded both of soul and body; who, after teaching the multitude, fed them; who repulsed none for being ignorant; was impatient with none for being dull; despised none for being contemned by the world; rejected none for being sinners; who encouraged those whose importunity others censured; who in healing sicknesses converted souls, who gave bread, and forgave injuries!

It will be the endeavour of the sincere Christian to illustrate his devotions in the morning, by his actions during the day. He will try to make his conduct a practical exposition of the divine prayer which made a part of them. He will desire, "to hallow the name of God," to promote the enlargement and "the coming" of the "kingdom" of

of Chriſt. He will endeavour to do and to ſuffer his whole will; "to forgive," as he himſelf truſts that he is forgiven. He will reſolve to avoid that "temptation" into which he had been praying "not to be led;" and he will labour to ſhun the "evil" from which he had been begging to be "delivered." He thus makes his prayers as practical as the other parts of his religion, and labours to render his conduct as ſpiritual as his prayers. The commentary and the text are of reciprocal application.

If this gracious Saviour has left us a perfect model for our devotion in his prayer, he has left a model no leſs perfect for our practice in his Sermon. This divine Expoſition has been ſometimes miſunderſtood. It was not ſo much a ſupplement to a defective law, as the reſtoration of the purity of a perfect law from the corrupt interpretations of its blind expounders. Theſe perſons had ceaſed to conſider it as forbidding the principle of ſin, and as only forbidding the act. Chriſt reſtores it to its original

meaning,

meaning, ſpreads it out in its due extent, ſhews the largeneſs of its dimenſions and the ſpirit of its inſtitution. He unfolds all its motions, tendencies, and relations. Not contenting himſelf, as human Legiſlators are obliged to do, to prohibit a man the act which is injurious to others, but the inward temper which is prejudicial to himſelf.

There cannot be a more ſtriking inſtance, how emphatically every doctrine of the Goſpel has a reference to practical goodneſs, than is exhibited by St. Paul, in that magnificent picture of the Reſurrection, in his Epiſtle to the Corinthians, which our Church has happily ſelected, for the conſolation of ſurvivors at the laſt cloſing ſcene of mortality. After an inference, as triumphant as it is logical, that becauſe "Chriſt is riſen, we ſhall riſe alſo;" after the moſt philoſophical illuſtration of the raiſing of the body from the duſt, by the proceſs of grain ſown in the earth, and ſpringing up into a new mode of exiſtence; after deſcribing the ſubjugation of all things to the Redeemer, and

his laying down the mediatorial Kingdom; after ſketching with a ſeraph's pencil, the relative glories of the celeſtial and terreſtrial bodies; after exhauſting the grandeſt images of created nature, and the diſſolution of nature itſelf; after ſuch a diſplay of the ſolemnities of the great day, as makes this world and all its concerns ſhrink into nothing: in ſuch a moment, when, if ever the rapt ſpirit might be ſuppoſed too highly wrought for precept and admonition—the apoſtle wound up, as he was, by the energies of inſpiration, to the immediate view of the glorified ſtate—the laſt trumpet ſounding—the change from mortal to immortality effected in the twinkling of an eye—the ſting of death drawn out—victory ſnatched from the grave—then, by a turn, as ſurpriſing as it is beautiful, he draws a concluſion as unexpectedly practical as his premiſes were grand and awful:—"*Therefore*, my beloved brethren, be ye ſtedfaſt, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." Then at once, by another quick tranſition,

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reforting from the duty to the reward, and, winding up the whole with an argument as powerful as his rhetoric had been ſublime, he adds, — "forafmuch as ye know that your labour is not vain in the Lord."

CHAP. III.

Miſtakes in Religion.

TO point out with preciſion all the miſtakes which exiſt in the preſent day, on the awful ſubject of Religion, would far exceed the limits of this ſmall work. No mention therefore is intended to be made of the opinions or the practice of any particular body of people; nor will any notice be taken of any of the peculiarities of the numerous ſects and parties which have riſen up among us. It will be ſufficient for the preſent purpoſe, to hazard ſome ſlight remarks on a few of thoſe common claſſes of characters which belong more or leſs to moſt general bodies.

There are, among many others, three different ſorts of religious Profeſſors. The religion of one conſiſts in a ſturdy defence of what they themſelves call orthodoxy, an

attend-

attendance on public worſhip, and a general decency of behaviour. In their views of religion, they are not a little apprehenſive of exceſs, not perceiving that their danger lies on the other ſide. They are far from rejecting faith or morals, but are ſomewhat afraid of *believing* too much, and a little ſcrupulous about *doing* too much, leſt the former be ſuſpected of fanaticiſm, and the latter of ſingularity. Theſe Chriſtians conſider Religion as a point, which they, by their regular obſervances, having attained, there is nothing further required but to maintain the point they have reached, by a repetition of the ſame obſervances. They are therefore ſatisfied to remain ſtationary, conſidering that whoever has obtained his end, is of courſe ſaved the labour of purſuit; he is to keep his ground without troubling himſelf in ſearching after an imaginary perfection.

Theſe frugal Chriſtians are afraid of nothing ſo much as ſuperfluity in their love, and ſupererogation in their obedience. This kind of fear however is always ſuperfluous,

but moſt eſpecially in thoſe who are troubled with the apprehenſion. They are apt to weigh in the nicely-poiſed ſcales of ſcrupulous exactneſs, the duties which muſt of hard neceſſity be done, and thoſe which without much riſk may be left undone; compounding for a larger indulgence by the relinquiſhment of a ſmaller; giving up, through fear, a trivial gratification to which they are leſs inclined, and ſnatching, doubtingly, as an equivalent at one they like better. The gratification in both caſes being perhaps ſuch as a manly mind would hardly think worth contending for, even were religion out of the queſtion. Nothing but love to God can conquer love of the world. One grain of that divine principle dropping in would make the ſcale of ſelf-indulgence kick the beam.

Theſe perſons dread nothing ſo much as enthuſiaſm. Yet if to look for effects without their prediſpoſing cauſes; to depend for Heaven on that to which Heaven was never promiſed, be features of enthuſiaſm, then are they themſelves enthuſiaſts.

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The religion of a ſecond claſs, we have already deſcribed in the two preceding chapters. It conſiſts in a heart devoted to its Maker; inwardly changed in its temper and diſpoſition, yet deeply ſenſible of its remaining infirmities; continually aſpiring however to higher improvements in faith, hope, and charity, and thinking that "the greateſt of theſe is *charity*." Theſe, by the former claſs, are reckoned enthuſiaſts, but they are in fact, if Chriſtianity be true, acting on the only rational principles. If the doctrines of the Goſpel have any ſolidity, if its promiſes have any meaning, theſe Chriſtians are building on no falſe ground. They hope that ſubmiſſion to the power of God, obedience to his laws, compliance with his will, truſt in his word, are, through the efficacy of the eternal ſpirit, real evidences, becauſe they are vital acts of genuine faith in Jeſus Chriſt. If they profeſs not to place their reliance on works, they are however more zealous in performing them than the others, who, profeſſing to depend on their good

deeds for ſalvation, are not always diligent in ſecuring it by the very means which they themſelves eſtabliſh to be alone effectual.

There is a third claſs—the high flown profeſſor, who looks down from the giddy heights of Antinomian deluſion on the other two, abhors the one and deſpiſes the other, concludes that the one is loſt, and the other in a fair way to be ſo. Though perhaps not living himſelf in any courſe of immorality, which requires the ſanction of ſuch doctrines, he does not heſitate to imply, in his diſcourſe, that virtue is heatheniſh and good works ſuperfluous, if not dangerous. He does not conſider that though the Goſpel is an act of oblivion to penitent ſinners, yet it no where promiſes pardon to thoſe who continue to live in a ſtate of rebellion againſt God, and of diſobedience to his laws. He forgets to inſiſt to others that it is of little importance even to believe that ſin is an evil, (which however they do not always believe) while they perſiſt to live in it; that to know every thing of duty except the doing it, is to offend

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God with an aggravation, from which ignorance itself is exempt. It is not giving ourselves up to Christ in a nameless, inexplicable way, which will avail us. God loves an humble, not an audacious faith. To suppose that the blood of Christ redeems us from sin, while sin continues to pollute the soul, is to suppose an impossibility; to maintain that it is effectual for the salvation, and not for the sanctification of the sinner, is to suppose that it acts like an amulet, an incantation, a talisman, which is to produce its effect by operating on the imagination and not on the disease.

The Religion which mixes with human passions, and is set on fire by them, will make a stronger blaze than that light which is from above, which sheds a steady and lasting brightness on the path, and communicates a sober but durable warmth to the heart. It is equable and constant; while the other, like culinary fire, fed by gross materials, is extinguished the sooner from the fierceness of the flame.

That religion which is merely ſeated in the paſſions, is not only liable to wear itſelf out by its own impetuoſity, but to be driven out by ſome other paſſion. The dominion of violent paſſions is ſhort. They diſpoſſeſs each other. When religion has had its day, it gives way to the next uſurper. Its empire is no more ſolid than it is laſting, when principle and reaſon do not fix it on the throne.

The firſt of the above claſſes conſider prudence as the paramount virtue in Religion. Their antipodes, the flaming profeſſors, believe a burning zeal to be the excluſive grace. *They* reverſe Saint Paul's collocation of the three Chriſtian graces, and think that the greateſt of theſe is *faith*. Though even in reſpect of this grace, their conduct and converſation too often give us reaſon to lament that they do not bear in mind its genuine and diſtinctive properties. Their faith inſtead of working by love, ſeems to be adopted from a notion that it leaves the Chriſtian nothing to do, rather

than

than becauſe it is its nature to lead him to do more and better than other men.

In this caſe, as in many others, that which is directly contrary to what is wrong, is wrong alſo. If each opponent would only barter half his favourite quality with the favourite quality of the other, both parties would approach nearer to the truth. They might even furniſh a complete Chriſtian between them, that is, provided the zeal of the one was ſincere, and the prudence of the other honeſt. But the misfortune is, each is as proud of not poſſeſſing the quality he wants, becauſe his adverſary has it, as he is proud of poſſeſſing that of which the other is deſtitute, and *becauſe* he is deſtitute of it.

Among the many miſtakes in religion, it is commonly thought that there is ſomething ſo unintelligible, abſurd, and fanatical in the term converſion, that thoſe who employ it run no ſmall hazard of being involved in the ridicule it excites. It is ſeldom uſed but ludicrouſly, or in contempt. This ariſes partly from the levity and ignorance of the

cenſurer, but perhaps as much from the imprudence and enthuſiaſm of thoſe who have abſurdly confined it to real or ſuppoſed inſtances of ſudden or miraculous changes from profligacy to piety. But ſurely, with reaſonable people, we run no riſk in aſſerting that he, who being awakened by any of thoſe various methods which the Almighty uſes to bring his creatures to the knowledge of himſelf, who ſeeing the corruptions that are in the world, and feeling thoſe with which his own heart abounds, is brought, whether gradually or more rapidly, from an evil heart of unbelief, to a lively faith in the Redeemer; from a life, not only of groſs vice, but of worldlineſs and vanity, to a life of progreſſive piety; whoſe humility keeps pace with his progreſs; who, though his attainments are advancing, is ſo far from counting himſelf to have attained, that he preſſes onward with unabated zeal, and evidences, by the change in his conduct, the change that has taken place in his heart — ſuch a one is ſurely as ſincerely converted,

and

and the effect is as much produced by the ſame divine energy, as if ſome inſtantaneous revolution in his character had given it a miraculous appearance. The doctrines of Scripture are the ſame now as when David called them, "a law *converting* the ſoul, and giving *light* to the eyes." This is perhaps the moſt accurate and comprehenſive definition of the change for which we are contending, for it includes both the illumination of the underſtanding, and the alteration in the diſpoſition.

If then this obnoxious expreſſion ſignify nothing more nor leſs than that change of character which conſiſts in turning from the world to God, however the *term* may offend, there is nothing ridiculous in the *thing*. Now, as it is not for the term which we contend, but for the principle conveyed by it; ſo it is the principle and not the term, which is the real ground of objection; though it is a little inconſiſtent that many who would ſneer at the idea of converſion, would yet take it extremely ill if it were ſuſpected that their hearts were not turned to God.

Reformation,

Reformation, a term againſt which no objection is ever made, would, if words continued to retain their primitive ſignification, convey the ſame idea. For it is plain, that to *re-form* means to make anew. In the preſent uſe, however, it does not convey the meaning in the ſame extent, nor indeed does it imply the operation of the ſame principle. Many are reformed on human motives, many are partially reformed; but only thoſe who, as our great Poet ſays, are "reformed altogether," are converted. There is no complete reformation in the conduct effected without a revolution of the heart. Ceaſing from ſome ſins; retaining others in a leſs degree; or adopting ſuch as are merely creditable; or flying from one ſin to another; or ceaſing from the external act without any internal change of diſpoſition, is not Chriſtian reformation. The new principle muſt aboliſh the old habit, the rooted inclination muſt be ſubdued by the ſubſtitution of an oppoſite one. The natural bias muſt be changed. The actual offence will no more be pardoned than cured if the inward corruption

ruption be not eradicated. To be "alive unto God through Jeſus Chriſt" muſt follow "the death unto ſin." There cannot be new aims and ends where there is not a new principle to produce them. We ſhall not chuſe a new path until a light from Heaven direct our choice and "guide our feet." We ſhall not "run the way of God's commandments" till God himſelf enlarge our heart.

We do not, however, inſiſt that the change required is ſuch as precludes the poſſibility of falling into ſin; but it is a change which fixes in the Soul ſuch a diſpoſition as ſhall make ſin a burden, as ſhall make the deſire of pleaſing God the governing deſire of a mind; as ſhall make him hate the evil which he does; as ſhall make the lowneſs of his attainments the ſubject of his deepeſt ſorrow. A Chriſtian has hopes and fears, cares and temptations, inclinations and deſires, as well as other men. God in changing the heart does not extinguiſh the paſſions. Were that the caſe, the Chriſtian life would ceaſe to be a warfare.

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We are often deceived by that partial improvement which appears in the victory over some one bad quality. But we muſt not miſtake the removal of a ſymptom for a radical cure of the diſeaſe. An occaſional remedy might remove an accidental ſickneſs, but it requires a general regimen to remove the diſeaſed conſtitution.

It is the natural but melancholy hiſtory of the unchanged heart that, from youth to advanced years, there is often a revolution in the character but ſcarcely in the ſtate; in the number and quality of its ſubjects, but ſtill the levity, vanity, and ſelf-confidence of the young man is carried into the buſineſs and only meet, and miſs with, the diſappointments of a mature period; that inſtead of crying out with the royal Prophet, "O remember not my old ſins," he is inflaming his reckoning by new ones: that age protracting all the fault of youth, furniſhes its own contingent of vices; that ſloth, ſuſpicion, and covetouſneſs, ſwell the account which Religion has not been called in to cancel:

that

[illegible] world, [illegible] loſt the power to do right, he would ſtill nothing of its power to influence him, inſtead of improving in candour by the diſcovery of his own defects, that very conſciouſneſs would make him leſs tolerant of the defects of others, and more ſuſpicious of their approaches to virtue. His charity in a warmer climate having failed to bring him to that return of moiſture for which it was partly prepared, and having never flowed from the genuine ſpring, is dried up. His friendſhips having been formed on worldly principles or intereſt, or ambition, or convivial hilarity, fail him. "One muſt make ſome ſacrifices to the world," is the prevailing language of the nominal Chriſtian. "What will the world pay you for your ſacrifices?" replies the real Chriſtian. Though he finds that the world is inſolvent, that it pays nothing of what it promiſed, for it cannot beſtow what it does not poſſeſs—happineſs; yet he continues to cling to it almoſt as confidently as if it had never diſappointed

appointed him.—Were we called upon to name the object under the Sun which excites the deepeſt commiſeration in the heart of Chriſtian ſenſibility, which includes in itſelf the moſt affecting incongruities, which contains the ſum and ſubſtance of real human miſery, we ſhould not heſitate to ſay AN IRRELIGIOUS OLD AGE. The mere debility of declining years, even the hopeleſſneſs of decrepitude, in the pious, though they excite ſympathy, yet it is the ſympathy of tenderneſs unmixed with diſtreſs. We take and give comfort from the cheering perſuaſion that the exhauſted body will ſoon ceaſe to clog its immortal companion; that the dim and failing eyes will ſoon open on a world of glory.—Dare we paint the reverſe of the picture? Dare we ſuffer the imagination to dwell on the opening proſpects of hoary impiety? Dare we figure to ourſelves that the weakneſs, the miſeries, the terrors we are now commiſerating, are ceaſe are peace, are happineſs, compared with the unutterable perſpective?

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There is a fatal way of lulling the conſcience by entertaining diminiſhing thoughts of ſins long ſince committed. We perſuade ourſelves to forget them, and we therefore perſuade ourſelves that they are not remembered by God. But though diſtance diminiſhes objects to the eye of the beholder, it does not actually leſſen them. Their real magnitude remains the ſame. Deliver us, merciful God, from the deluſion of believing that ſecret ſins, of which the world has no cognizance, early ſins, which the world has forgotten, but which are known to "Him with whom we have to do," become by ſecrecy and diſtance as if they had never been. "Are not theſe things noted in THY book?" If we remember them, God may forget them, eſpecially if our remembrance be ſuch as to induce a ſound repentance. If we remember them not, he aſſuredly will. The holy contrition which ſhould accompany this remembrance, while it will not abate our humble truſt in our compaſſionate Redeemer, will keep our conſcience tender, and our heart watchful.

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We do not deny that there is frequently much kindneſs and urbanity, much benevolence and generoſity in men who do not even pretend to be religious. Theſe qualities often flow from conſtitutional feeling, natural ſoftneſs of temper, and warm affections; often from an elegant education, that beſt *human* ſweetner and poliſher of ſocial life. We feel a tender regret as we exclaim, "what a fine ſoil would ſuch diſpoſitions afford to plant religion in!" Well bred perſons are accuſtomed to reſpect all the decorums of ſociety, to connect inſeparably the ideas of perſonal comfort with public eſteem, of generoſity with credit, of order with reſpectability. They have a keen ſenſe of diſhonour, and are careful to avoid every thing that may bring the ſhadow of diſcredit on their name. Public opinion is the breath by which they live, the ſtandard by which they act; of courſe they would not lower, by gross miſconduct, that ſtandard on which their happineſs depends. They have been taught to reſpect themſelves; this they can do with more ſecurity while

while they can retain, on this half-way principle, the reſpect of others.

In ſome who make further advances towards religion, we continue to ſee it in that ſame low degree which we have always obſerved. It is dwarfiſh and ſtunted, it makes no ſhoots. Though it gives ſome ſigns of life it does not grow. By a tame and ſpiritleſs round, or rather by this fixed and immoveable poſition, we rob ourſelves of that fair reward of peace and joy which attends on an humble conſciouſneſs of progreſs; on the feeling of difficulties conquered; on a ſenſe of the divine favour. That religion which is profitable, is commonly perceptible. Nothing ſupports a traveller in his Chriſtian courſe, like the conviction that he is getting on; like looking back on the country he has paſſed; and, above all, like the ſenſe of that protection which has hitherto carried him on, and of that grace which has promiſed to ſupport him to the end.

The proper motion of the renewed heart is ſtill directed upward. True religion is

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of an aſpiring nature, continually tending towards that Heaven from whence it was tranſplanted. Its top is high becauſe its root is deep. It is watered by a perennial fountain; in its moſt flouriſhing ſtate it is always capable of further growth. Real goodneſs proves itſelf to be ſuch by a continual deſire to be better. No virtue on earth is ever in a complete ſtate. Whatever ſtage of religion any man has attained, if he be ſatisfied to reſt in that ſtage, we would not call that man religious. The Goſpel ſeems to conſider the higheſt degree of goodneſs as the loweſt with which a Chriſtian ought to ſit down ſatisfied. We cannot be ſaid to be finiſhed in any Chriſtian grace, becauſe there is not one which may not be carried further than we have carried it. This promotes the double purpoſe of keeping us humble as to our preſent ſtage, and of ſtimulating us to ſomething higher which we may hope to attain.

That ſuperficial thing, which by mere people of the world is dignified by the appellation

lation of religion, though it brings juſt that degree of credit which makes part of the ſyſtem of worldly Chriſtians, neither brings comfort for this world, nor ſecurity for the next. Outward obſervances, indiſpenſable as they are, are not religion. They are the acceſſory, but not the principal; they are important aids and adjuncts, but not the thing itſelf; they are its aliment but not its life, the fuel but not the flame, the ſcaffolding but not the edifice. Religion can no more ſubſiſt merely by them, than it can ſubſiſt without them. They are divinely appointed, and muſt be conſcientiouſly obſerved; but obſerved as a means to promote an end, and not as an end in themſelves.

The heartleſs homage of formal worſhip, where the vital power does not give life to the form, the cold compliment of ceremonial attendance, without the animating principle, as it will not bring peace to our own mind, ſo neither will it ſatisfy a jealous God. That God whoſe eye is on the heart, "who trieth the reins and ſearcheth the

ſpirits," will not be ſatisfied that we make him little more than a nominal deity, while the world is the real object of our worſhip. Such perſons ſeem to have almoſt the whole body of performance; all they want is the ſoul. They are conſtant in their devotions, but the heart, which even the heathens eſteemed the beſt part of the ſacrifice, they keep away. They read the Scriptures, but reſt in the letter, inſtead of trying themſelves by its ſpirit. They conſider it as an enjoined taſk, but not as the quick and powerful inſtrument put into their hands for the critical diſſection of "piercing and dividing aſunder the ſoul and ſpirit;" not as the penetrating "diſcerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Theſe well-intentioned perſons ſeem to ſpend no inconſiderable portion of time in religious exerciſes, and yet complain that they make little progreſs. They almoſt ſeem to inſinuate, as if the Almighty did not keep his word with them, and manifeſt that religion to them is not "pleaſantneſs," nor her "paths peace."

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Of ſuch may we not aſk, Would you not do better to examine than to complain? to enquire whether you do, indeed, poſſeſs a heart which, notwithſtanding its imperfections, is ſincerely devoted to God? He who does not deſire to be perfect is not ſincere. Would you not do well to convince yourſelves that God is not unfaithful; that his promiſes do not fail, that his goodneſs is not ſlackened? May you not be entertaining ſome ſecret infidelity, practiſing ſome latent diſobedience, withholding ſome part of your heart, neglecting to exerciſe that faith, ſubtracting ſomething from that devotedneſs to which a Chriſtian ſhould engage himſelf, and to which the promiſes of God are annexed? Do you indulge no propenſities contrary to his will? Do you never reſiſt the dictates of his ſpirit, never ſhut your eyes to its illumination, nor your heart to its influences? Do you not indulge ſome cheriſhed ſin which obſcures the light of grace, ſome practice which obſtructs the growth of virtue, ſome diſtruſt which chills

the warmth of love? The diſcovery will repay the ſearch, and if you ſucceed in this ſcrutiny, let not the detection diſcourage but ſtimulate.

If, then, you reſolve to take up religion in earneſt, eſpecially if you have actually adopted its cuſtomary forms, reſt not in ſuch low attainments as will afford neither preſent peace nor future happineſs. To know Chriſtianity only in its external forms, and its internal diſſatisfactions, its ſuperficial appearances without, and its diſquieting apprehenſions within, to be deſirous of ſtanding well with the world as a Chriſtian, yet to be unſupported by a well-founded Chriſtian hope, to depend for happineſs on the opinion of men, inſtead of the favour of God, to go on dragging through the mere exerciſes of piety, without deriving from them real ſtrength, or ſolid peace; to live in the dread of being called an enthuſiaſt, by outwardly exceeding in religion, and in ſecret conſciouſneſs of falling ſhort of it, to be conformed to the world's view of Chriſtianity,

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rather than to aſpire to be transformed by the renewing of your mind, is a ſtate not of pleaſure but of penalty, not of conqueſt but of hopeleſs conflict, not of ingenuous love but of tormenting fear. It is knowing religion only as the captive in a foreign land knows the country in which he is a priſoner. He hears from the cheerful natives of its beauties, but is himſelf ignorant of every thing beyond his own gloomy limits. He hears of others as free and happy, but feels nothing himſelf but the rigours of incarceration.

The Chriſtian character is little underſtood by the votaries of the world; if it were, they would be ſtruck with its grandeur. It is the very reverſe of that meanneſs and puſillanimity, that abject ſpirit and thoſe narrow views which thoſe who know it not aſcribe to it.

A Chriſtian lives at the height of his being; not only at the top of his ſpiritual, but of his intellectual life. He alone lives in the full exerciſe of his rational powers.

Religion ennobles his reaſon while it enlarges it.

Let, then, your ſoul act up to its high deſtination; let not that which was made to ſoar to heaven, grovel in the duſt. Let it not live ſo much below itſelf. You wonder it is not more fixed, when it is perpetually reſting on things which are not fixed themſelves. In the reſt of a Chriſtian there is ſtability. Nothing can ſhake his confidence but ſin. Outward attacks and troubles rather fix than unſettle him, as tempeſts from without only ſerve to root the oak faſter, while an inward canker will gradually rot and decay it.

That religion which ſinks Chriſtianity into a mere conformity to religious uſages, muſt always fail of ſubſtantial effects. If ſin be ſeated in the heart, if that be its home, that is the place in which it muſt be combated. It is in vain to attack it in the ſuburbs when it is lodged in the centre. Mere forms can never expel that enemy which they can never reach. By a religion

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of decencies, our corruptions may perhaps be driven out of ſight, but they will never be driven out of poſſeſſion. If they are expelled from their outworks, they will retreat to their citadel. If they do not appear in the groſſer forms prohibited by the Decalogue, ſtill they will exiſt. The ſhape may be altered, but the principle will remain. They will exiſt in the ſpiritual modification of the ſame ſins equally forbidden by the divine Expoſitor. He who dares not be revengeful, will be unforgiving. He who ventures not to break the letter of the ſeventh commandment in act, will violate it in the ſpirit. He who has not courage to renounce Heaven by profligacy, will ſcale it by pride, or forfeit it by unprofitableneſs.

It is not any vain hope built on ſome external privilege or performance on the one hand, nor a preſumptuous confidence that our names are written in the book of life, on the other, which can afford a reaſonable ground of ſafety? but it is endeavouring to

keep all the commandments of God—it is living to him who died for us—it is being conformed to his image as well as redeemed by his blood. This is Chriſtian virtue, this is the holineſs of a believer. A lower motive will produce a lower morality, but ſuch an unſanctified morality God will not accept.

For it will little avail us that Chriſt has died for us, that he has conquered ſin, triumphed over the powers of darkneſs, and overcome the world, while any ſin retains its unreſiſted dominion in our hearts, while the world is our idol, while our foſtered corruptions cauſe us to prefer darkneſs to light. We muſt not perſuade ourſelves that we are reconciled to God while our rebellious hearts are not reconciled to goodneſs.

It is not caſting a ſet of opinions into a mould, and a ſet of duties into a ſyſtem, which conſtitutes the Chriſtian religion. The circumference muſt have a centre, the body muſt have a ſoul, the performances muſt have a principle. Outward obſervances

ances were wisely constituted to rouse our forgetfulness, to awaken our secular spirits, to call back our negligent hearts; but it was never intended that we should stop short in the use of them. They were designed to excite holy thoughts, to quicken us to holy deeds, but not to be used as equivalents for either. But we find it cheaper to serve God in a multitude of exterior acts, than to starve one interior corruption.

Nothing short of that uniform stable principle, that fixedness in religion which directs a man in all his actions, aims, and pursuits, to God as his ultimate end, can give consistency to his conduct, or tranquillity to his soul. This state once attained, he will not waste all his thoughts and designs upon the world; he will not lavish all his affections on so poor a thing as his own advancement. He will desire to devote all to the only object worthy of them, to God. Our Saviour has taken care to provide that our ideas of glorifying

him, may not run out into fanciful chimeras or ſubtile inventions, by ſimply ſtating — "HEREIN IS MY FATHER GLORIFIED THAT YE BEAR MUCH FRUIT." This he goes on to inform us is the true evidence of our being of the number of his people, by adding—"So ſhall ye be my diſciples."

CHAP. IV.

Periodical Religion.

WE deceive ourſelves not a little when we fancy that what is emphatically called *the world* is only to be found in this or that ſituation. The world is every where. It is a nature as well as a place; a principle as well as "a local habitation and a name." Though the principle and the nature flouriſh moſt in thoſe haunts which are their congenial ſoil, yet we are too ready, when we withdraw from the world abroad to bring it home, to lodge it in our own boſom. The natural heart is both its temple and its worſhipper.

But the moſt devoted idolater of the world, with all the capacity and induſtry which he may have applied to the ſubject, has never yet been able to accompliſh the grand deſign of uniting the intereſts of Heaven and earth. This experiment, which

has been more aſſiduouſly and more frequently tried than that of the Philoſopher for the grand Hermetic ſecret, has been tried with about the ſame degree of ſucceſs. The moſt laborious proceſs of the ſpiritual chemiſt to reconcile religion with the world has never yet been competent to make the contending principles coaleſce.

But to drop metaphor. Religion was never yet thoroughly reliſhed by a heart full of the world. The world in return cannot be completely enjoyed where there is juſt religion enough to diſturb its falſe peace. In ſuch minds Heaven and earth ruin each other's enjoyments.

Life paſſes in the hopeleſs project of combining both. It is the object of the worldly ſyſtem to flatter our paſſions, of the religious principle to ſubdue them, yet we adopt the one practically, while we maintain the other ſpeculatively; we graſp at the gratifications of the one, we will not relinquiſh the promiſes of the other. What makes life ſo little productive of real happineſs is that we

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are thus driving at oppoſite intereſts at the ſame time, though not with the ſame zeal.

It is no wonder that the more abſtract doctrines of religion can make little impreſſion on minds ſupremely engroſſed by the objects of ſenſe, when its moſt obvious and practical truths can but ſuperficially impreſs them: when all the preſent objects which abſorb their thoughts and affections are of a caſt and character which furniſh a perpetual hindrance and a powerful counteraction.

There is a religion which is too ſincere for hypocriſy but too tranſient to be profitable; too ſuperficial to reach the heart, too unproductive to proceed from it. It is ſlight, but as far as it goes, not falſe. It has diſcernment enough to diſtinguiſh ſin, but not firmneſs enough to oppoſe it; compunction ſufficient to ſoften the heart, but not vigour ſufficient to reform it. It laments when it does wrong, and performs all the functions of repentance of ſin except forſaking it. It has every thing of devotion except the ſtability, and gives every thing to religion, except the heart.

This is a religion of times, events, and circumſtances; it is brought into play by accidents, and dwindles away with the occaſion which called it out. Feſtivals and Faſts, which occur but ſeldom, are much obſerved, and it is to be feared *becauſe* they occur but ſeldom; while the great feſtival which comes every week comes too often to be ſo reſpectfully treated. The piety of theſe people comes out much in ſickneſs, but is apt to retreat again as recovery approaches. If they die they are placed by their admirers in the Saints' Calendar; if they recover, they go back into the world they had renounced, and again ſuſpend their amendment as often as Death ſuſpends his blow.

There is another claſs whoſe views are ſtill lower, who yet cannot ſo far ſhake off religion as to be eaſy without retaining its brief and ſtated forms, and who contrive to mix up theſe forms with a faith of a piece with their practice. They blend their inconſiſtent works with a vague and unwarranted reliance on what the Saviour has done

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for them, and thus patch up a merit and a propitiation of their own — running the hazard of incurring the danger of puniſhment by their lives, and inventing a ſcheme to avert it by their creed. Religion never interferes with their pleaſures except by the compliment of a ſhort and occaſional ſuſpenſion. Having got through theſe periodical acts of devotion, they return to the ſame ſcenes of vanity and idleneſs which they had quitted for the temporary duty; forgetting that it was the very end of thoſe acts of devotion to cure the vanity and to correct the idleneſs. Had the periodical obſervance anſwered its true deſign, it would have diſinclined them to the pleaſure inſtead of giving them a diſpenſation for its indulgence. Had they uſed the devout exerciſe in a right ſpirit, and improved it to its true end, it would have ſet the heart and life at work on all thoſe purſuits which it was calculated to promote. But their project has more ingenuity. By the ſtated minutes they give to religion, they cheaply purchaſe a protection for

for the miſemployment of the reſt of their time. They make theſe periodical devotions a kind of ſpiritual Inſurance Office, which is to make up to the Adventurers in pleaſure, any loſs or damage which they may ſuſtain in its voyage.

It is of theſe ſhallow devotions, theſe preſumed equivalents for a new heart and a new life, that God declares by the Prophet, that he is "weary." Though of his own expreſs appointment, they become "an abomination" to him, as ſoon as the ſign comes to be reſted in for the thing ſignified. We Chriſtians have "our New Moons and our ſacrifices" under other names and other ſhapes; of which ſacrifices, that is, of the ſpirit in which they are offered, the Almighty has ſaid, "I cannot away with them, they are iniquity."

Now is this ſuperficial devotion that "giving up ourſelves not with our lips only, but with our lives," to our Maker, to which we ſolemnly pledge ourſelves, at leaſt once a week? Is conſecrating an hour or

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two to public worſhip on the Sunday morning, making the Sabbath "a delight?" Is defecrating the reſt of the day by "doing our own ways, finding our own pleaſure, ſpeaking our own words," making it "honourable?"

Sometimes in an awakening ſermon, theſe periodical religioniſts hear, with awe and terror, of the hour of death and the day of judgment. Their hearts are penetrated with the ſolemn ſounds. They confeſs the awful realities by the impreſſion they make on their own feelings. The Sermon ends, and with it the ſerious reflections it excited. While they liſten to theſe things, eſpecially if the preacher be alarming, they are all in all to them. They return to the world—and theſe things are as if they were not, as if they had never been; as if their reality laſted only while they were preached; as if their exiſtence depended only on their being heard; as if truth were no longer truth than while it ſolicited their notice; as if there were as little ſtability in religion itſelf as in

their attention to it. As ſoon as their minds are diſengaged from the queſtion, one would think that death and judgment were an invention, that Heaven and hell were blotted from exiſtence, that eternity ceaſed to be eternity, in the long intervals in which they ceaſed to be the object of *their* conſideration.

This is the natural effect of what we venture to denominate *periodical religion.* It is a tranſient homage kept totally diſtinct and ſeparate from the reſt of our lives, inſtead of its being made the prelude and the principle of a courſe of pious practice; inſtead of our weaving our devotions and our actions into one uniform tiſſue by doing all in one ſpirit and to one end. When worſhippers of this deſcription pray for "a clean heart and a right Spirit," when they beg of God to "turn away their eyes from beholding vanity," is it not to be feared that they pray to be made what they reſolve never to become, that they would be very unwilling to become as good as they pray to be made, and would

be ſorry to be as penitent as they profeſs to deſire? But alas! they are in little danger of being taken at their word; there is too much reaſon to fear their petitions will not be heard or anſwered; for prayer for the pardon of ſin will obtain no pardon while we retain the ſin in hope that the prayer will be accepted without the renunciation.

The moſt ſolemn office of our Religion, the ſacred memorial of the death of its Author, the bleſſed injunction and tender teſtimony of his dying love, the conſolation of the humble believer, the gracious appointment for ſtrengthening his faith, quickening his repentance, awakening his gratitude, and kindling his charity, is too often reſorted to on the ſame erroneous principle. He who ventures to live without the uſe of his holy inſtitution, lives in a ſtate of diſobedience to the laſt appointment of his Redeemer. He who reſts in it as a means for ſupplying the place of habitual piety, totally miſtakes its deſign, and is fatally deceiving his own ſoul.

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This awful ſolemnity is, it is to be hoped, rarely frequented even by this claſs of Chriſtians without a deſire of approaching it with the pious feelings above deſcribed. But if they carry them to the Altar, are they equally anxious to carry them away from it, are they anxious to maintain them after it? Does the rite ſo ſeriouſly approached commonly leave any veſtige of ſerioufneſs behind it? Are they careful to perpetuate the feelings they were ſo deſirous to excite? Do they ſtrive to make them produce ſolid and ſubſtantial effects? — Would that this inconſtancy of mind were to be found only in the claſs of characters under conſideration! Let the reader, however ſincere in his deſires, let the writer, however ready to lament the levity of others, ſeriouſly aſk their own hearts if they can entirely acquit themſelves of the inconſiſtency they are ſo forward to blame? If they do not find the charge brought againſt others b. too applicable to themſelves?

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Irreverence antecedent to, or during this ſacred ſolemnity, is far leſs rare than durable improvement after it. If there are, as we are willing to believe, none ſo prophane as to violate the act, except thoſe who impiouſly uſe it only as "a picklock to a place," there are too few who make it laſtingly beneficial. Few ſo thoughtleſs as not to approach it with reſolutions of amendment; few comparatively who carry theſe reſolutions into effect. Fear operates in the previous inſtance. Why ſhould not love operate in that which is ſubſequent?

A periodical religion is accompanied with a periodical repentance. This ſpecies of repentance is adopted with no ſmall mental reſervation. It is partial and diſconnected. Theſe fragments of contrition, theſe broken parcels of penitence——while a ſucceſſion of worldly purſuits is not only reſorted to, but is intended to be reſorted to during the whole of the intervening ſpaces, are not that ſorrow which the Almighty has promiſed to accept. To render them pleaſing to God and

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efficacious to ourſelves, there muſt be an agreement in the parts, an entireneſs in the whole web of life. There muſt be an integral repentance. A quarterly contrition in the four weeks preceding the ſacred ſeaſons will not wipe out the daily offences, the hourly negligences of the whole ſinful year. Sins half forſaken through fear, and half retained through partially reſiſted temptation and partially adopted reſolution, make up but an unprofitable piety.

In the boſom of theſe profeſſors there is a perpetual conflict between fear and inclination. In converſation you will generally find them very warm in the cauſe of Religion; but it is Religion as oppoſed to Infidelity, not as oppoſed to worldly mindedneſs. They defend the worſhip of God, but deſire to be excuſed from his ſervice. Their heart is the ſlave of the world, but their blindneſs hides from them the turpitude of that world. They commend piety, but dread its requiſitions. They allow that repentance is neceſſary, but then how eaſy is it to find reaſons

ſons for deferring a neceſſary evil? *Who* will haſtily adopt a painful meaſure which he can find a creditable pretence for evading? They cenſure whatever is oſtenſibly wrong, but avoiding only part of it, the part they retain robs them of the benefit of their partial renunciation.

We cannot ſufficiently admire the wiſdom of the church in enjoining extraordinary acts of devotion at the return of thoſe feſtivals ſo happily calculated to excite devotional feelings. Extraordinary repentance of ſin is peculiarly ſuitable to the ſeaſons that record thoſe grand events which ſin occaſioned. But the church never intended that theſe more ſtated and ſtrict ſelf-examinations ſhould preclude our habitual ſelf-inſpection. It never intended its holy offices to ſupply the place of general holineſs, but to promote it. It intended that theſe ſolemn occaſions ſhould animate the flame of piety, but it never meant to furniſh a reaſon for neglecting to keep the flame alive till the next return ſhould again kindle the dying embers. It

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meant that every ſuch ſeaſon ſhould gladden the heart of the Chriſtian at its approach, and not diſcharge him from duty at its departure. It meant to lighten his conſcience of the burden of ſin, not to encourage him to begin a new ſcore, again to be wiped off at the ſucceeding feſtival. It intended to quicken the vigilance of the believer, and not to diſmiſs the centinel from his poſt. If we are not the better for theſe divinely appointed helps, we are the worſe. If we uſe them as a diſcharge from that diligence which they were intended to promote, we convert our bleſſings into ſnares, our devotions into ſins.

This abuſe of our advantages ariſes from our not incorporating our devotions into the general habit of our lives. Till our religion become an inward principle and not an external act, we ſhall not receive that benefit from her forms, however excellent, which they are calculated to convey. It is to thoſe who poſſeſs the ſpirit of Chriſtianity that her forms are ſo valuable. To them

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the form excites the ſpirit, as the ſpirit animates the form. Till religion becomes the deſire of our hearts, it will not become the buſineſs of our lives. We are far from meaning that it is to be its actual occupation; but that every portion of time, every habit of the mind, every act of life, is to be animated by its ſpirit, influenced by its principle, governed by its power.

The very make of our nature and our neceſſary commerce with the world, naturally fill our hearts and minds with thoughts and ideas, over which we have unhappily too little controul. We find this to be the caſe when in our better hours we attempt to give ourſelves up to ſerious reflection. How many intruſions of worldly thoughts, how many impertinent imaginations, not only irrelevant but uncalled and unwelcome, crowd in upon the mind ſo forcibly as ſcarcely to be repelled by our ſincereſt efforts. How impotant then to repel ſuch images muſt that mind be, which is devoted to worldly purſuits, which yields itſelf up to them, whoſe opinions, habits,

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and conduct are under their allowed influence!

We ſhould fairly adjuſt the claims of both worlds, and having equitably determined their value, act upon that determination. We ſhall then fix the proportions and the limits of that attention which each deſerves. A juſt eſtimate of their reſpective worth would cool our ardor and tame our immoderate deſires after things ſo really little in themſelves, and ſo ſhort in their duration. Providence has ſet narrow bounds to life, piety ſhould proportionally narrow our anxieties reſpecting it; for to be inordinately enamoured of any object, the worth of which will not juſtify the attachment, argues an ill-regulated mind and a defective judgment.

All the ſtrong remarks of devout writers on the littleneſs of thoſe things which the world call great, might be looked upon as mere rhetorical flouriſhes, or as the envious cbullitions of retired men who could not attain the things they contemn, did not their brief duration juſtify the deſcription. — Let the cenſurer only image to himſelf the world

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paſſing away, and the earth vaniſhing, ere long to all, and to every man at his death, which to him is the end of the world, and he whom he now deſpiſes as a paſſionate declaimer will then appear a ſober reaſoner.

Let us not then conſider a ſpirit of worldlineſs as a little infirmity, as a natural and therefore a pardonable weakneſs; as a trifling error which will be overlooked for the ſake of our many good qualities. It is in fact the eſſence of our other faults: the temper that ſtands between us and our ſalvation: the ſpirit which is in direct oppoſition to the ſpirit of God. Individual ſins may more eaſily be cured, but this is the principle of all ſpiritual diſeaſe. A worldly ſpirit, where it is rooted and cheriſhed, runs through the whole character, inſinuates itſelf in all we ſay and think and do. It is this which makes us ſo dead in religion, ſo averſe from ſpiritual things, ſo forgetful of God, ſo unmindful of eternity, ſo ſatisfied with ourſelves, ſo impatient of ſerious diſcourſe, and ſo alive to that vain and frivolous intercourſe which

excludes intellect almoſt as much as piety from our general converſation.

It is not therefore our more conſiderable actions alone which require watching, for they ſeldom occur. They do not form the habit of life in ourſelves, nor the chief importance of our example to others. It is to our ordinary behaviour, it is to our deportment in common life; it is to our prevailing turn of mind in general intercourſe, by which we ſhall profit or corrupt thoſe with whom we aſſociate. It is our conduct in ſocial life which will help to diffuſe a ſpirit of piety or a diſtaſte to it. If we have much influence, this is the place in which particularly to exert it. If we have little, we have ſtill enough to infect the temper and lower the tone of our narrow ſociety.

If we really believe that it is the deſign of Chriſtianity to raiſe us to a participation of the divine nature, the ſlighteſt reflection on this elevation of our character would lead us to maintain its dignity in the ordinary intercourſe of life. We ſhould not ſo much

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enquire whether we are tranſgreſſing any actual prohibition, whether any ſtanding law is pointed againſt us, as whether we are ſupporting the dignity of the Chriſtian character; whether we are acting ſuitably to our profeſſion; whether more exactneſs in the common occurrences of the day, more correctneſs in our converſation, would not be ſuch evidences of our religion, as by being obvious and intelligible, might not almoſt infallibly produce important effects.

The moſt inſignificant people muſt not through indolence and ſelfiſhneſs undervalue their own influence. Moſt perſons have a little circle which they are a ſort of centre. Its ſmallneſs may leſſen their quantity of good, but does not diminish the duty of using that little influence well. Where is the human being ſo inconſiderable but that he may in ſome meaſure benefit others, either by calling their virtues into exerciſe, or by ſetting them an example of virtue himſelf? But we are humble juſt in the wrong place. When the exhibition of our talents or ſplen-

did qualities is in queſtion we are not backward in the diſplay. When a little ſelf-denial is to be exerciſed, when a little good might be effected by our example, by our diſcreet management in company, by giving a better turn to converſation, then at once we grow wickedly modeſt—"Such an inſignificant creature as I am can do no good."—"Had I a higher rank or brighter talents, then indeed my influence might be exerted to ſome purpoſe."—Thus under the maſk of diffidence, we juſtify our indolence; and let ſlip thoſe leſſer occaſions of promoting religion which if we all improved, how much might the condition of ſociety be raiſed!

The hackneyed interrogation, "What—muſt we be always talking about religion?" muſt have the hackneyed anſwer—Far from it. Talking about religion is not being religious. But we may bring the *ſpirit* of religion into company and keep it in perpetual operation when we do not profeſſedly make it our ſubject. We may be conſtantly

advancing

advancing its intereſts, we may without effort or affectation be giving an example of candour, of moderation, of humility, of forbearance. We may employ our influence by correcting falſehood, by checking levity, by diſcouraging calumny, by vindicating miſrepreſented merit, by countenancing every thing which has a good tendency—in ſhort, by throwing our whole weight, be it great or ſmall, into the right ſcale.

CHAP. V.

Prayer.

PRAYER is the application of want to him who only can relieve it; the voice of ſin to him who alone can pardon it. It is the urgency of poverty, the proſtration of humility, the fervency of penitence, the confidence of truſt. It is not eloquence, but earneſtneſs, not the definition of helpleſſneſs, but the feeling of it; not figures of ſpeech, but compunction of ſoul. It is the "Lord ſave us, we periſh," of drowning Peter; the cry of faith to the ear of mercy.

Adoration is the nobleſt employment of created beings; confeſſion the natural language of guilty creatures; gratitude the ſpontaneous expreſſion of pardoned ſinners. Prayer is deſire. It is not a mere conception of the mind, nor a mere effort of the intellect, nor an act of the memory; but

but an elevation of the ſoul towards its Maker; a preſſing ſenſe of our own ignorance and infirmity, a conſciouſneſs of the perfections of God, of his readineſs to hear, of his power to help, of his willingneſs to ſave. It is not an emotion produced in the ſenſes, nor an effect wrought by the imagination; but a determination of the will, an effuſion of the heart.

Prayer is the guide to ſelf-knowledge by prompting us to look after our ſins in order to pray againſt them; a motive to vigilance, by teaching us to guard againſt thoſe ſins which, through ſelf-examination, we have been enabled to detect.

Prayer is an act both of the underſtanding and of the heart. The underſtanding muſt apply itſelf to the knowledge of the divine perfections, or the heart will not be led to the adoration of them. It would not be a *reaſonable* ſervice, if the mind was excluded. It muſt be rational worſhip, or the human worſhipper would not bring to the ſervice the diſtinguiſhing faculty of his nature,

which is reaſon. It muſt be ſpiritual wor-ſhip or it would want the diſtinctive quality to make it acceptable to Him who is a ſpirit, and who has declared that he will be worſhipped "in ſpirit and in truth."

Prayer is right in itſelf as the moſt powerful means of reſiſting ſin and advancing in holineſs. It is above all right, as every thing is, which has the authority of Scripture, the command of God, and the example of Chriſt.

There is a perfect conſiſtency in all the ordinations of God; a perfect congruity in the whole ſcheme of his diſpenſations. If man were not a corrupt creature, ſuch prayer as the Goſpel enjoins would not have been neceſſary. Had not Prayer been an important means for curing thoſe corruptions, a God of perfect wiſdom would not have ordered it. He would not have prohibited every thing which tends to inflame and promote them, had they not exiſted, nor would he have commanded every thing that has a tendency to diminiſh and remove them,

them, had not their exiſtence been fatal. Prayer therefore is an indiſpenſable part of his economy and of our obedience.

It is a hackneyed objection to the uſe of Prayer, that it is offending the omniſcience of God to ſuppoſe he requires information of our wants. But no objection can be more futile. We do not pray to inform God of our wants, but to expreſs our ſenſe of the wants which he already knows. As he has not ſo much made his promiſes to our neceſſities, as to our requeſts, it is reaſonable that our requeſts ſhould be made before we can hope that our neceſſities will be relieved. God does not promiſe to thoſe who want that they ſhall "have," but to thoſe who "aſk;" nor to thoſe who need that they ſhall "find," but to thoſe who "ſeek." So far therefore from his previous knowledge of our wants being a ground of objection to Prayer, it is in fact the true ground for our application. Were he not Knowledge itſelf, our information would be of as little uſe, as our appli-

cation would be, were he not Goodneſs itſelf.

We cannot attain to a juſt notion of Prayer while we remain ignorant of our own nature, of the nature of God as revealed in Scripture, of our relation to him and dependance on him. If therefore we do not live in the daily ſtudy of the Holy Scriptures, we ſhall want the higheſt motives to this duty, and the beſt helps for performing it; if we do, the cogency of theſe motives, and the ineſtimable value of theſe helps, will render argument unneceſſary and exhortation ſuperfluous.

One cauſe therefore of the dullneſs of many Chriſtians in prayer is their ſlight acquaintance with the Sacred volume. They hear it periodically, they read it occaſionally; they are contented to know it hiſtorically; conſider it ſuperficially; but they do not endeavour to get their minds imbued with its ſpirit. If they ſtore their memory with its facts, they do not impreſs their hearts with its truths. They do not regard it as

the nutriment on which their ſpiritual life and growth depend. They do not pray over it; they do not conſider all its doctrines as of practical application; they do not cultivate that ſpiritual diſcernment which alone can enable them judiciouſly to appropriate its promiſes and its denunciations to their own actual caſe. They do not apply it as an unerring line to aſcertain their own rectitude or obliquity.

In our retirements, we too often fritter away our precious moments, moments reſcued from the world, in trivial, ſometimes, it is to be feared, in corrupt thoughts. But if we muſt give the reins to our imagination, let us ſend this excurſive faculty to range among great and noble objects. Let it ſtretch forward under the ſanction of faith and the anticipation of prophecy, to the accompliſhment of thoſe glorious promiſes and tremendous threatenings which will ſoon be realized in the eternal world. Theſe are topics which under the ſafe and ſober

guidance of Scripture, will fix its largeſt ſpeculations and ſuſtain its loftieſt flights. The ſame Scripture, while it expands and elevates the mind, will keep it ſubject to the dominion of truth; while at the ſame time it will teach it that its boldeſt excurſions muſt fall infinitely ſhort of the aſtoniſhing realities of a future ſtate.

Though we cannot pray with a too deep ſenſe of ſin, we may make our ſins too excluſively the object of our prayers. While we keep, with a ſelf-abaſing eye, our own corruptions in view, let us look with equal intentneſs on that mercy, which cleanſeth from all ſin. Let our prayers be all humiliation, but let them not be all complaint. When men indulge no other thought but that they are rebels, the hopeleſſneſs of pardon hardens them into diſloyalty. Let them look to the mercy of the King, as well as to the rebellion of the Subject. If we contemplate his grace as diſplayed in the Goſpel, then, though our humility will increaſe, our

deſpair

deſpair will vaniſh. Gratitude in this, as in human inſtances, will create affection. "We love him becauſe he firſt loved us."

Let us therefore always keep our unworthineſs in view as a reaſon why we ſtand in need of the mercy of God in Chriſt; but never plead it as a reaſon why we ſhould not draw nigh to him to implore that mercy. The beſt men are unworthy for their own ſakes; the worſt on repentance will be accepted for his ſake and through his merits.

In prayer, then, the perfections of God, and eſpecially his mercies in our redemption, ſhould occupy our thoughts as much as our ſins; our obligation to him as much as our departures from him. We ſhould keep up in our hearts a conſtant ſenſe of our own weakneſs, not with a deſign to diſcourage the mind and depreſs the ſpirits; but with a view to drive us out of ourſelves, in ſearch of the divine aſſiſtance. We ſhould contemplate our infirmity in order to draw us to look for his ſtrength, and to ſeek that power from God which we vainly look for in ourſelves:

ſelves: We do not tell a ſick friend of his danger in order to grieve or terrify him, but to induce him to apply to his Phyſician, and to have recourſe to his remedy.

Among the charges which have been brought againſt ſerious piety, one is that it teaches men to deſpair. The charge is juſt in one ſenſe as to the fact, but falſe in the ſenſe intended. It teaches us to deſpair indeed of ourſelves, while it inculcates that faith in a Redeemer, which is the true antidote to deſpair. Faith quickens the doubting ſpirit while it humbles the preſumptuous. The lowly Chriſtian takes comfort in the bleſſed promiſe, that God will never forſake them that are his. The preſumptuous man is equally right in the doctrine, but wrong in applying it. He takes that comfort to himſelf which was meant for another claſs of characters. The mal-appropriation of Scripture promiſes, and threatenings, is the cauſe of much error and deluſion.

Some devout enthuſiaſts have fallen into error by an unnatural and impracticable diſin-

diſintereſtedneſs, aſſerting that God is to be loved excluſively for himſelf, with an abſolute renunciation of any view of advantage to ourſelves; yet that prayer cannot be mercenary, which involves God's glory with our own happineſs, and makes his will the law of our requeſts. Though we are to deſire the glory of God ſupremely; though this ought to be our grand actuating principle, yet he has graciouſly permitted, commanded, invited us, to attach our own happineſs to this primary object. The Bible exhibits not only a beautiful, but an inſeparable combination of both, which delivers us from the danger of unnaturally renouncing our own benefit, for the promotion of God's glory on the one hand; and on the other, from ſeeking any happineſs independent of him, and underived from him. In enjoining us to love him ſupremely, he has connected an unſpeakable bleſſing with a paramount duty, the higheſt privilege with the moſt poſitive command.

What a triumph for the humble Chriſtian to be aſſured, that "the high and lofty one which

which inhabiteth eternity," condeſcends at the ſame time to dwell in the heart of the contrite; in *his* heart! To know that God is the God of his life, to *know* that he is even invited to take the Lord for his God. —To cloſe with God's offers, to accept his invitations, to receive God as his portion, muſt ſurely be more pleaſing to our heavenly Father, than ſeparating our happineſs from his glory. To diſconnect our intereſts from his goodneſs, is at once to detract from his perfections, and to obſcure the brightneſs of our own hopes. The declarations of inſpired Writers are confirmed by the authority of the heavenly hoſts. They proclaim that the glory of God and the happineſs of his creatures, ſo far from interfering, are connected with each other. We know but of one Anthem compoſed and ſung by Angels, and this moſt harmoniouſly combines "the glory of God in the higheſt with peace on earth and good will to men."

"The beauty of Scripture," ſays the great Saxon Reformer, "conſiſts in pronouns." This God is *our* God — God even our

own

own God ſhall bleſs us — How delightful the appropriation! to glorify him as being in himſelf conſummate excellence, and to love him from the feeling that his excellence is directed to our felicity! Here modeſty would be ingratitude, diſintereſtedneſs, rebellion. It would be ſevering ourſelves from him, in whom we live, and move, and are; it would be diſſolving the connection which he has condeſcended to eſtabliſh between himſelf and his Creatures.

It has been juſtly obſerved, that the Scripture Saints make this union the chief ground of their grateful exultation — "*My* ſtrength," "*my* rock," "*my* fortreſs," "*my* deliverer!" again "let the God of *my* ſalvation be exalted!" Now take away the pronoun and ſubſtitute the article *the*, how comparatively cold is the impreſſion! The conſummation of the joy ariſes from the peculiarity, the intimacy, the endearment of the relation.

Nor to the liberal Chriſtian is the grateful joy diminiſhed, when he bleſſes his God as "the

" the God of all them that truſt in him." All general bleſſings, will he ſay, all providential mercies, are mine individually, are mine as completely, as if no other ſhared in the enjoyment. Life, light, the earth and heavens, the Sun and Stars, whatever ſuſtains the body, and recreates the ſpirits! My obligation is as great as if the mercy had been made purely for me; as great? nay it is greater—it is augmented by a ſenſe of the millions who participate in the bleſſing. The ſame enlargement of perſonal obligation holds good, nay riſes higher in the mercies of Redemption. The Lord is *my* Saviour as completely as if he had redeemed only me. That he has redeemed " a great multitude which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues," is diffuſion without abatement; it is general participation without individual diminution. Each has all.

In adoring the Providence of God, we are apt to be ſtruck with what is new and out of courſe, while we too much overlook long,

long, habitual, and uninterrupted mercies. But common mercies, if leſs ſtriking, are more valuable, both becauſe we have them always, and for the reaſon above aſſigned, becauſe others ſhare them. The ordinary bleſſings of life are overlooked for the very reaſon that they ought to be moſt prized, becauſe they are moſt uniformly beſtowed. They are moſt eſſential to our ſupport, and when once they are withdrawn we begin to find that they are alſo moſt eſſential to our comfort. Nothing raiſes the price of a bleſſing like its removal, whereas it was its continuance which ſhould have taught us its value. We require novelties, to awaken our gratitude, not conſidering that it is the duration of mercies which enhances their value. We want freſh excitements. We conſider mercies long enjoyed as things of courſe, as things to which we have a ſort of preſumptive claim; as if God had no right to withdraw what he has once beſtowed, as if he were obliged to continue what he has once been pleaſed to confer.

But

But that the Sun has ſhone unremittingly from the day that God created him, is not a leſs ſtupendous exertion of power than that the hand which fixed him in the heavens and marked out his progreſs through them, once ſaid by his ſervant, "Sun, ſtand thou ſtill upon Gibeon." That he has gone on in his ſtrength, driving his uninterrupted career, and "rejoicing as a Giant to run his courſe," for ſix thouſand years, is a more aſtoniſhing exhibition of Omnipotence than that he ſhould have been once ſuſpended by the hand which ſet him in motion. That the ordinances of heaven, that the eſtabliſhed laws of nature, ſhould have been for one day interrupted to ſerve a particular occaſion, is a leſs real wonder, and certainly a leſs ſubſtantial bleſſing, than that in ſuch a multitude of ages they ſhould have purſued their appointed courſe, for the comfort of the whole ſyſtem.

As the affections of the Chriſtian ought to be ſet on things above, ſo it is for them that his prayers will be chiefly addreſſed. God,

in promiſing to "give thoſe who delight in him the deſire of their heart," could never mean temporal things, for theſe they might deſire improperly as to the object, and inordinately as to the degree. The promiſe relates principally to ſpiritual bleſſings. He not only gives us theſe mercies, but the very deſire to obtain them is alſo his gift. Here our prayer requires no qualifying, no conditioning, no limitation. We cannot err in our choice, for God himſelf is the object of it: we cannot exceed in the degree, unleſs it were poſſible to love him too well, or to pleaſe him too much.

We ſhould pray for worldly comforts, and for a bleſſing on our earthly plans, though lawful in themſelves, conditionally, and with a reſervation, becauſe, after having been earneſt in our requeſts for them, it may happen that when we come to the petition "thy will be done" we may in theſe very words be inadvertently praying that our previous petitions may not be granted. In this brief requeſt conſiſts the vital principle, the eſſential ſpirit of

of Prayer. God ſhews his munificence in encouraging us to aſk moſt earneſtly for the greateſt things, by promiſing that the ſmaller "ſhall be added unto us." We therefore acknowledge his liberality moſt when we requeſt the higheſt favours. He manifeſts his infinite ſuperiority to earthly fathers by chiefly delighting to confer thoſe ſpiritual gifts which *they* leſs ſolicitouſly deſire for their children than thoſe worldly advantages on which God ſets ſo little value.

Nothing ſhort of a ſincere devotedneſs to God can enable us to maintain an equality of mind, under unequal circumſtances. We murmur that we have not the things we aſk amiſs, not knowing that they are withheld by the ſame mercy by which the things that are good for us are granted. Things good in themſelves may not be good for us. A reſigned ſpirit is the proper diſpoſition to prepare us for receiving mercies, or for having them denied. Reſignation of ſoul, like the allegiance of a good ſubject, is always in readineſs though not in action; whereas

whereas an impatient mind is a ſpirit of diſaffection, always prepared to revolt, when the will of the ſovereign is in oppoſition to that of the ſubject. This ſeditious principle is the infallible characteriſtic of an unrenewed mind.

A ſincere love of God will make us thankful when our ſupplications are granted, and patient and cheerful when they are denied. He who feels his heart riſe againſt any divine diſpenſation ought not to reſt till by ſerious meditation and earneſt prayer it be moulded into ſubmiſſion. An habit of acquieſcence in the will of God, will ſo operate on the faculties of his mind, that even his judgment will embrace the conviction, that what he once ſo ardently deſired, would not have been that good thing, which his blindneſs had conſpired with his wiſhes to make him believe it to be. He will recollect the many inſtances in which if his importunity had prevailed, the thing which ignorance requeſted, and wiſdom denied, would have inſured his miſery. Every freſh diſappoint-

diſappointment will teach him to diſtruſt himſelf and to confide in God. Experience will inſtruct him that there may be a better way of hearing our requeſts than that of granting them. Happy for us that He to whom they are addreſſed knows which is beſt and acts upon that knowledge.

We ſhould endeavour to render our private devotions effectual remedies for our own particular ſins. Prayer againſt ſin in general is too indefinite to reach the individual caſe. We muſt bring it home to our own heart, elſe we may be confeſſing another man's ſins and overlooking our own. If we have any predominant fault, we ſhould pray more eſpecially againſt that fault. If we pray for any virtue of which we particularly ſtand in need, we ſhould dwell on our own deficiences in that virtue, till our ſouls become deeply affected with our want of it. Our Prayers ſhould be circumſtantial, not as was before obſerved for the information of infinite wiſdom, but for the ſtirring up of our own dull affections. And as the recapitulation of

our wants tends to keep up a ſenſe of our dependence, the enlarging on our eſpecial mercies will tend to keep alive a ſenſe of gratitude. While indiſcriminate petitions, confeſſions, and thankſgivings, leave the mind to wander in indefinite devotion and unaffecting generalities, without perſonality and without appropriation. It muſt be obvious that we except thoſe grand univerſal points in which all have an equal intereſt, and which muſt always form the eſſence of family, and eſpecially of public prayer.

On the bleſſing attending importunity in prayer, the Goſpel is abundantly explicit. God perhaps delays to give, that we may perſevere in aſking. He may require importunity for our own ſakes, that the frequency and urgency of the petition may bring our hearts into that frame to which he will be favourable.

As we ought to live in a ſpirit of obedience to his commands, ſo we ſhould live in a frame of waiting for his bleſſing on our prayers, and in a ſpirit of gratitude when

we have obtained it. This is that "preparation of the heart" which would always keep us in a poſture for duty. If we deſert the duty becauſe an immediate bleſſing does not viſibly attend it, it ſhews that we do not ſerve God out of conſcience but ſelfiſhneſs; that we grudge expending on him that ſervice which brings us in no immediate intereſt. Though he grant not our petition, let us never be tempted to withdraw our application.

Our reluctant devotions may remind us of the remark of a certain great political wit, who apologized for his late attendance in Parliament, by his being detained while a party of ſoldiers were *dragging a volunteer* to his duty. How many excuſes do we find for not being in time! How many apologies for brevity! How many evaſions for neglect! How unwilling, too often, are we to come into the divine preſence, how reluctant to remain in it! Thoſe hours which are leaſt valuable for buſineſs, which are leaſt ſeaſonable for pleaſure, we commonly give to religion.

ligion. Our energies, which were ſo readily exerted in the ſociety we have juſt quitted, are ſunk as we approach the divine preſence. Our hearts, which were all alacrity in ſome frivolous converſation, become cold and inanimate, as if it were the natural property of devotion to freeze the affections. Our animal ſpirits which ſo readily performed their functions before, now ſlacken their vigour and loſe their vivacity. The ſluggiſh body ſympathizes with the unwilling mind, and each promotes the deadneſs of the other; both are ſlow in liſtening to the call of duty; both are ſoon weary in performing it. How do our fancies rove back to the pleaſures we have been enjoying! How apt are the diverſified images of thoſe pleaſures to mix themſelves with our better thoughts, to pull down our higher aſpirations. As prayer requires all the energies of the compound being of man, ſo we too often feel as if there were a conſpiracy of body, ſoul, and ſpirit, to diſincline and diſqualify us for it.

When the heart is once ſincerely turned to

religion, we need not, every time we pray, examine into every truth, and ſeek for conviction over and over again; but aſſume that thoſe doctrines are true, the truth of which we have already proved. From a general and fixed impreſſion of theſe principles, will reſult a taſte, a diſpoſedneſs, a love, ſo intimate, that the convictions of the underſtanding will become the affections of the heart.

To be deeply impreſſed with a few fundamental truths, to digeſt them thoroughly, to meditate on them ſeriouſly, to pray over them fervently, to get them deeply rooted in the heart, will be more productive of faith and holineſs, than to labour after variety, ingenuity, or elegance. The indulgence of imagination will rather diſtract than edify. Searching after ingenious thoughts will rather divert the attention from God to ourſelves, than promote fixedneſs of thought, ſingleneſs of intention, and devotedneſs of ſpirit. Whatever is ſubtil and refined, is in danger of being unſcriptural. If we do

not

not guard the mind it will learn to wander in queſt of novelties. It will learn to ſet more value on original thoughts than devout affections. It is the buſineſs of prayer to caſt down imaginations which gratify the natural activity of the mind, while they leave the heart unhumbled.

We ſhould confine ourſelves to the preſent buſineſs of the preſent moment; we ſhould keep the mind in a ſtate of perpetual dependence; we ſhould entertain no long views. "Now is the accepted time." "To-day we muſt hear his voice." "Give us *this* day our daily bread." The manna will not keep till to-morrow: to-morrow will have its own wants, and muſt have its own petitions. To-morrow we muſt ſeek the bread of heaven afreſh.

We ſhould however avoid coming to our devotions with unfurniſhed minds. We ſhould be always laying in materials for prayer, by a diligent courſe of ſerious reading, by treaſuring up in our minds the moſt important truths. If we ruſh into the divine

preſence with a vacant or ignorant and unprepared mind, with a heart full of the world; as we ſhall feel no diſpoſition or qualification for the work we are about to engage in, ſo we cannot expect that our petitions will be heard or granted. There muſt be ſome congruity between the heart and the object, ſome affinity between the ſtate of our minds and the buſineſs in which they are employed, if we would expect ſucceſs in the work.

We are often deceived both as to the principle and the effect of our prayers. When from ſome external cauſe the heart is glad, the ſpirits light, the thoughts ready, the tongue voluble, a kind of ſpontaneous eloquence is the reſult; with this we are pleaſed, and this ready flow we are willing to impoſe on ourſelves for piety.

On the other hand, when the mind is dejected, the animal ſpirits low, the thoughts confuſed; when appoſite words do not readily preſent themſelves, we are apt to accuſe our hearts of want of fervour, to lament

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our weakneſs, and to mourn that becauſe we have had no pleaſure in praying, our prayers have, therefore, not aſcended to the throne of mercy. In both caſes we perhaps judge ourſelves unfairly. Theſe unready accents, theſe faltering praiſes, theſe ill-expreſſed petitions, may find more acceptance than the florid talk with which we were ſo well ſatisfied: the latter conſiſted, it may be, of ſhining thoughts, floating on the fancy, eloquent words dwelling only on the lips; the former was the ſighing of a contrite heart, abaſed by the feeling of its own unworthineſs, and awed by the perfections of a holy and heart-ſearching God. The heart is diſſatisfied with its own dull and taſteleſs repetitions, which, with all their imperfections, Infinite Goodneſs may perhaps hear with favor *.—We may not only be elated with

* Of theſe ſort of repetitions, our admirable Church Liturgy has been accuſed as a fault; but this defect, if it be one, happily accommodates itſelf to our infirmities. Where is the favoured being whoſe attention never wanders, whoſe heart accompanies his lips in

with the fluency but even with the fervency of our prayers. Vanity may grow out of the very act of renouncing it, and we may begin to feel proud at having humbled ourſelves ſo eloquently.

There is however a ſtrain and ſpirit of prayer equally diſtinct from that facility and copiouſneſs for which we certainly are never the better in the ſight of God, and from that conſtraint and dryneſs for which we may be never the worſe. There is a ſimple, ſolid, pious ſtrain of prayer in which the ſupplicant is ſo filled and occupied with a ſenſe of his own dependence, and of the importance of the things for which he aſks, and ſo perſuaded of the power and grace of God through Chriſt to give him thoſe things, that while he is engaged in it, he does not merely imagine, but feels aſſured that God

every ſentence? Is there no abſence of mind in the petitioner, no wandering of the thoughts, no inconſtancy of the heart, which theſe repetitions are wiſely calculated to correct, to rouſe the dead attention, to bring back the ſtrayed affections?

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is nigh to him as a reconciled father, ſo that every burden and doubt are taken off from his mind. "He knows," as St. John expreſſes it, "that he has the petitions he deſired of God," and feels the truth of that promiſe, "while they are yet ſpeaking I will hear." This is the perfection of prayer.

CHAP. VI.

Cultivation of a Devotional Spirit.

TO maintain a devotional Spirit, two things are eſpecially neceſſary—habitually to cultivate the diſpoſition, and habitually to avoid whatever is unfavourable to it. Frequent retirement and recollection are indiſpenſable, together with ſuch a general courſe of reading, as, if it do not actually promote the ſpirit we are endeavouring to maintain, ſhall never be hoſtile to it. We ſhould avoid as much as in us lies all ſuch ſociety, all ſuch amuſements as excite tempers which it is the daily buſineſs of a Chriſtian to ſubdue, and all thoſe feelings which it is his conſtant duty to ſuppreſs.

And here may we venture to obſerve, that if ſome things which are apparently innocent, and do not aſſume an alarming aſpect, or bear a dangerous character; things which the generality

nerality of decorous people affirm, (how truly we know not,) to be ſafe for them; yet if we find that theſe things ſtir up in us improper propenſities, if they awaken thoughts which ought not to be excited; if they abate our love for religious exerciſes, or infringe on our time for performing them; if they make ſpiritual concerns appear inſipid, if they wind our hearts a little more about the world; in ſhort, if we have formerly found them injurious to our own ſouls, then let no example or perſuaſion, no belief of their alleged innocence, no plea of their perfect ſafety, tempt us to indulge in them. It matters little to *our* ſecurity what they are to others. Our buſineſs is with ourſelves. Our reſponſibility is on our own heads. Others cannot know the ſide on which we are aſſailable. Let our own unbiaſſed judgment determine our opinion, let our own experience decide for our own conduct.

In ſpeaking of books, we cannot forbear noticing that very prevalent ſort of reading, which is little leſs productive of evil, little

leſs prejudicial to moral and mental improvement, than that which carries a more formidable appearance. We cannot confine our cenſure to thoſe more corrupt writings which deprave the heart, debauch the imagination, and poiſon the principles. Of theſe the turpitude is ſo obvious that no caution on this head, it is preſumed, *can* be neceſſary. But if juſtice forbids us to confound the inſipid with the miſchievous, the idle with the vicious, and the frivolous with the profligate, ſtill we can only admit of ſhades, deep ſhades we allow, of difference. Theſe works, if comparatively harmleſs, yet debaſe the taſte, ſlacken the intellectual nerve, let down the underſtanding, ſet the fancy looſe, and ſend it gadding among low and mean objects. They not only run away with the time which ſhould be given to better things, but gradually deſtroy all taſte for better things. They ſink the mind to their own ſtandard, and give it a ſluggiſh reluctance, we had almoſt ſaid, a moral incapacity for every thing above their level. The mind, by long

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habit of ſtooping, loſes its erectneſs, and yields to its degradation. It becomes ſo low and narrow by the littleneſs of the things which engage it, that it requires a painful effort to lift itſelf high enough, or to open itſelf wide enough, to embrace great and noble objects. The appetite is vitiated. Exceſs, inſtead of producing a ſurfeit, by weakening the digeſtion, only induces a loathing for ſtronger nouriſhment. The faculties which might have been expanding in works of ſcience, or ſoaring in the contemplation of genius, become ſatisfied with the impertinences of the moſt ordinary fiction, loſe their reliſh for the ſeverity of truth, the elegance of taſte, and the ſoberneſs of religion. Lulled in the torpor of repoſe, the intellect dozes, and enjoys in its waking dream

All the wild traſh of ſleep, without the reſt.

In avoiding books which excite the paſſions, it would ſeem ſtrange to include even ſome devotional works. Yet ſuch as merely kindle warm feelings are not always the ſafeſt. Let us rather prefer thoſe which, while they

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tend to raiſe a devotional ſpirit, awaken the affections without diſordering them, which while they elevate the deſires, purify them; which ſhew us our own nature, and lay open its corruptions. Such as ſhew us the malignity of ſin, the deceitfulneſs of our hearts, the feebleneſs of our beſt reſolutions; ſuch as teach us to pull off the maſk from the faireſt appearances, and diſcover every hiding-place, where ſome lurking evil would conceal itſelf; ſuch as ſhew us not what we appear to others, but what we really are; ſuch as, co-operating with our interior feelings, and ſhewing us our natural ſtate, point out our abſolute need of a Redeemer, lead us to ſeek to him for pardon from a conviction that there is no other refuge, no other ſalvation. Let us be converſant with ſuch writings as teach us that while we long to obtain the remiſſion of our tranſgreſſions, we muſt not deſire the remiſſion of our duties. Let us ſeek for ſuch a Saviour as will not only deliver us from the puniſhment of ſin, but from its dominion alſo.

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The conſtant habit of peruſing devout books is ſo indiſpenſable, that it has been termed with great propriety the oil of the lamp of prayer. Too much reading, however, and too little meditation, may produce the effect of a lamp inverted, which is extinguiſhed by the very exceſs of that aliment whoſe property it is to feed it.

And let us ever bear in mind that the end of prayer is not anſwered when the Prayer is finiſhed. We ſhould regard prayer as a means to a farther end. The *act* of prayer is not ſufficient, we muſt cultivate a *ſpirit* of prayer. And though, when the actual devotion is over, we cannot, amid the diſtractions of company and buſineſs, always be thinking of heavenly things, yet the deſire, the frame, the propenſity, the willingneſs to return to them, we muſt, however difficult, endeavour to maintain.

The proper temper for prayer ſhould precede the act. The diſpoſition ſhould be wrought in the mind before the exerciſe is begun. To bring a proud temper to an humble

humble prayer, a luxurious habit to a self-denying prayer, or a worldly diſpoſition to a ſpiritually minded prayer, is a poſitive anomaly. A habit is more powerful than an act, and a previouſly indulged temper during the day will not, it is to be feared, be fully counteracted by the exerciſe of a few minutes devotion at night.

Prayer is deſigned for a perpetual renovation of the motives to virtue; if therefore the cauſe is not followed by its conſequence, a conſequence inevitable but for the impediments we bring to it, we rob our nature of its higheſt privilege, and run the danger of incurring a penalty where we are looking for a bleſſing.

That the habitual tendency of the life ſhould be the preparation for the ſtated prayer, is naturally ſuggeſted to us by our bleſſed Redeemer in his Sermon on the Mount. He announced the precepts of holineſs, and their correſponding beatitudes; he gave the ſpiritual expoſition of the Law, the directions for alms-giving, the exhort-

ation to love our enemies, nay, the eſſence and ſpirit of the whole Decalogue, previous to his delivering his own divine prayer, as a pattern for ours. Let us learn from this that the preparation of prayer is therefore to live in all thoſe purſuits which we may ſafely beg of God to bleſs, and in a conflict with all thoſe temptations into which we pray not to be led.

If God be the centre to which our hearts are tending, every line in our lives muſt meet in him. With this point in view there will be a harmony between our prayers and our practice, a conſiſtency between devotion and conduct, which will make every part turn to this one end, bear upon this one point. For the beauty of the Chriſtian ſcheme conſiſts not in parts, (however good in themſelves) which tend to ſeparate views, and lead to different ends; but it ariſes from its being one entire, uniform, connected plan, "compacted of that which every joint ſupplieth," and of which all the parts terminate in this one grand ultimate point.

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The deſign of Prayer therefore, as we before obſerved, is not merely to make us devout while we are engaged in it, but that its odour may be diffuſed through all the intermediate ſpaces of the day, enter into all its occupations, duties, and tempers. Nor muſt its reſults be partial, or limited to eaſy and pleaſant duties, but extend to ſuch as are leſs alluring. When we pray, for inſtance, for our enemies, the prayer muſt be rendered practical, muſt be made a means of ſoftening our ſpirit, and cooling our reſentment toward them. If we deſerve their enmity, the true ſpirit of prayer will put us upon endeavouring to cure the fault which has excited it. If we do not deſerve it, it will put us on ſtriving for a placable temper, and we ſhall endeavour not to let ſlip ſo favourable an occaſion of cultivating it. There is no ſuch ſoftener of animoſity, no ſuch ſoother of reſentment, no ſuch allayer of hatred, as ſincere cordial prayer.

It is obvious, that the precept to pray without ceaſing can never mean to enjoin a con-

a continual courſe of actual prayer. But while it more directly enjoins us to embrace all proper occaſions of performing this ſacred duty, or rather of claiming this valuable privilege, ſo it plainly implies that we ſhould try to keep up conſtantly that ſenſe of the divine preſence which ſhall maintain the diſpoſition. In order to this, we ſhould inure our minds to reflection; we ſhould encourage ſerious thoughts. A good thought barely paſſing through the mind will make little impreſſion on it. We muſt arreſt it, conſtrain it to remain with us, expand, amplify, and, as it were, take it to pieces. It muſt be diſtinctly unfolded, and carefully examined, or it will leave no preciſe idea, it muſt be fixed and incorporated, or it will produce no practical effect. We muſt not diſmiſs it till it has left ſome trace on the mind, till it has made ſome impreſſion on the heart.

On the other hand, if we give the reins to a looſe ungoverned fancy, at other times, if we abandon our minds to frivolous thoughts;

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if we fill them with corrupt images; if we cheriſh ſenſual ideas during the reſt of the day, can we expect that none of theſe images will intrude, that none of theſe impreſſions will be revived, but that "the temple into which foul things" have been invited will be cleanſed at a given moment; that worldly thoughts will recede and give place, at once, to pure and holy thoughts? Will that ſpirit, grieved by impurity, or reſiſted by levity, return with his warm beams, and cheering influences, to the contaminated manſion from which he has been driven out? Is it wonderful if finding no entrance into a heart filled with vanity he ſhould withdraw himſelf?—We cannot, in retiring into our cloſets, change our natures as we do our cloaths. The diſpoſition we carry thither will be likely to remain with us. We have no right to expect that a new temper will meet us at the door. We can only hope that the ſpirit we bring thither will be cheriſhed and improved. It is not eaſy, rather it is not poſſible, to graft genuine devotion

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on a life of an oppoſite tendency; nor can we delight ourſelves regularly for a few ſtated moments, in that God whom we have not been ſerving during the day. We may, indeed, to quiet our conſcience, take up the employment of prayer, but cannot take up the ſtate of mind which will make the employment beneficial to ourſelves, or the prayer acceptable to God, if all the previous day we have been careleſs of ourſelves, and unmindful of our Maker. *They* will not pray differently from the reſt of the world, who do not live differently.

What a contradiction is it to lament the weakneſs, the miſery, and the corruption of our nature, in our devotions, and then to ruſh into a life, though not perhaps of vice, yet of indulgences, calculated to encreaſe that weakneſs, to inflame thoſe corruptions, and to lead to that miſery! There is either no meaning in our prayers, or no ſenſe in our conduct. In the one we mock God, in the other we deceive ourſelves.

Will not he who keeps up an habitual intercourſe

tercourſe with his Maker, who is vigilant in thought, ſelf-denying in action, who ſtrives to keep his heart from wrong deſires, his mind from vain imaginations, and his lips from idle words, bring a more prepared ſpirit, a more collected mind, be more engaged, more penetrated, more preſent to the occaſion? Will he not feel more delight in this devout exerciſe, reap more benefit from it, than he who lives at random, prays from cuſtom, and who, though he dares not intermit the form, is a ſtranger to its ſpirit.

We ſpeak not here to the ſelf-ſufficient formaliſt, or the careleſs profligate. Among thoſe whom we now take the liberty to addreſs, are to be found, eſpecially in the higher claſs of females, the amiable and the intereſting, and, in many reſpects, the virtuous and correct: --- characters ſo engaging, ſo evidently made for better things, ſo capable of reaching high degrees of excellence, ſo formed to give the tone to Chriſtian practice, as well as to faſhion, ſo calculated to give a beautiful impreſſion of that religion which

which they profeſs without ſufficiently adorning; which they believe without fairly exemplifying; that we cannot forbear taking a tender intereſt in their welfare, we cannot forbear breathing a fervent prayer, that they may yet reach the elevation for which they were intended; that they may hold out a uniform and conſiſtent pattern, of "whatſoever things are pure, honeſt, juſt, lovely, and of good report!" This the Apoſtle goes on to intimate can only be done by THINKING ON THESE THINGS. Things can only influence our practice as they engage our attention. Would not then a confirmed habit of ſerious thought tend to correct that inconſideration, which we are willing to hope, more than want of principle, lies at the bottom of the inconſiſtency we are lamenting?

If, as it is generally allowed, the great difficulty of our ſpiritual life is to make the future predominate over the preſent, do we not, by the conduct we are regretting, aggravate what it is in our power to diminiſh?

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Miſcalculation of the relative value of things is one of the greateſt errors of our moral life. We eſtimate them in an inverſe proportion to their value, as well as to their duration: we laviſh earneſt and durable thoughts on things ſo trifling that they deſerve little regard, ſo brief that they "periſh with the uſing," while we beſtow only ſlight attention, on things of infinite worth; only tranſient thoughts, on things of eternal duration.

Thoſe who are ſo far conſcientious as not to intermit a regular courſe of devotion, and who yet allow themſelves at the ſame time to go on in a courſe of amuſements which excite a directly oppoſite ſpirit, are inconceivably augmenting their own difficulties. They are eagerly heaping up fuel in the day, on the fire which they intend to extinguiſh in the evening; they are voluntarily adding to the temptations, againſt which they mean to requeſt grace to ſtruggle. To acknowlege at the ſame time, that we find it hard to ſerve God as we ought, and yet to be ſyſtematically

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indulging habits, which muſt naturally increaſe the difficulty, makes our character almoſt ridiculous, while it renders our duty almoſt impracticable.

While we make our way more difficult by theſe very indulgences with which we think to cheer and refreſh it, the determined Chriſtian becomes his own pioneer; he makes his path comparatively eaſy by voluntarily clearing it of the obſtacles which impede his progreſs.

Theſe habitual indulgences ſeem a contradiction to that obvious law, that one virtue always involves another; for we cannot labour after any grace, that of prayer for inſtance, without reſiſting whatever is oppoſite to it. If then we lament, that it is ſo hard to ſerve God, let us not by our conduct furniſh arguments againſt ourſelves; for, as if the difficulty were not great enough in itſelf, we are continually heaping up mountains in our way, by indulging in ſuch purſuits and paſſions, as make a ſmall labour an inſurmountable one.

We may often judge better of our ſtate by the reſult, than by the act of prayer, our very defects, our coldneſs, deadneſs, wanderings, may leave more contrition on the ſoul, than the happieſt turn of thought. The feeling of our wants, the confeſſion of our ſins, the acknowledgment of our dependence, the renunciation of ourſelves, the ſupplication for mercy, the application to "the fountain opened for ſin," the cordial entreaty for the aid of the Spirit, the relinquiſhment of our own will, reſolutions of better obedience, petitions that theſe reſolutions may be directed and ſanctified, theſe are the ſubjects in which the ſupplicant ſhould be engaged, by which his thoughts ſhould be abſorbed. Can they be ſo abſorbed, if many of the intervening hours are paſſed in purſuits of a totally different complexion? purſuits which raiſe the paſſions which we are ſeeking to allay? Will the cheriſhed vanities go at our bidding? Will the required diſpoſitions come at our calling? Do we find our tempers ſo obedient, our

paſſions

paſſions ſo obſequious in the other concerns of life? If not, what reaſon have we to expect their obſequiouſneſs in this grand concern? We ſhould therefore endeavour to believe as we pray, to think as we pray, to feel as we pray, and to act as we pray. Prayer muſt not be a ſolitary, independent exerciſe; but an exerciſe interwoven with many, and inſeparably connected with that golden chain of Chriſtian duties, of which, when ſo connected, it forms one of the moſt important links.

Let us be careful that our cares, occupations and amuſements may be always ſuch that we may not be afraid to implore the divine bleſſing on them; this is the criterion of their ſafety and of our duty. Let us endeavour that in each, in all, one continually growing ſentiment and feeling of loving, ſerving, and pleaſing God, maintain its predominant ſtation in the heart.

An additional reaſon why we ſhould live in the perpetual uſe of prayer, ſeems to be, that our bleſſed Redeemer, after having given

both the example and the command, while on earth, condeſcends ſtill to be our unceaſing interceſſor in Heaven. Can we ever ceaſe petitioning for ourſelves, when we believe that he never ceaſes interceding for us?

If we are ſo unhappy as now to find little pleaſure in this holy exerciſe, that however is ſo far from being a reaſon for diſcontinuing it, that it affords the ſtrongeſt argument for perſeverance. That which was at firſt a form, will become a pleaſure; that which was a burden will become a privilege; that which we impoſe upon ourſelves as a medicine, will become neceſſary as an aliment, and deſirable as a gratification. That which is now ſhort and ſuperficial, will become copious and ſolid. The chariot-wheel is warmed by its own motion. Uſe will make that eaſy which was at firſt painful. That which is once become eaſy will ſoon be rendered pleaſant. Inſtead of repining at the performance, we ſhall be unhappy at the omiſſion. When a man recovering from ſickneſs attempts to walk, he does not

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diſcontinue the exerciſe becauſe he feels himſelf weak, nor even becauſe the effort is painful. He rather redoubles his exertion. It is from his perſeverance that he looks for ſtrength. An additional turn every day diminiſhes his repugnance, augments his vigour, improves his ſpirits. That effort which was ſubmitted to becauſe it was ſalutary, is continued becauſe the feeling of renovated ſtrength renders it delightful.

CHAP. VII.

The Love of God.

OUR love to God ariſes out of want. God's love to us out of fulneſs. Our indigence draws us to that power which can relieve, and to that goodneſs which can bleſs us. His overflowing love delights to make us partakers of the bounties he graciouſly imparts, not only in the gifts of his Providence, but in the richer communications of his grace. We are firſt drawn to love him from the conſideration of his mercies, from the experience of his bounties; but this conſideration and this experience in a rightly-turned mind lead us to love him for his own excellences. We can only be ſaid to love God, when we endeavour to glorify him, when we deſire a participation of his nature, when we ſtudy to imitate his perfections.

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We are ſometimes inclined to ſuſpect the love of God to us. We are too little ſuſpicious of our want of love to him. Yet if we examine the caſe by evidence, as we ſhould examine any common queſtion, what real inſtances can we produce of our love to Him? What imaginable inſtance can we not produce of his love to us? If neglect, forgetfulneſs, ingratitude, diſobedience, coldneſs in our affections, deadneſs in our duty, be evidences of our love to him, ſuch evidences, but ſuch only, we can abundantly allege. If life and all the countleſs catalogue of mercies that makes life pleaſant, be proofs of his love to us, theſe he has given us in hand;—if life eternal, if bleſſedneſs that knows no meaſure and no end, be proofs of love, theſe he has given us in promiſe—to the Chriſtian we had almoſt ſaid, he has given them in poſſeſſion.

When the adoring ſoul is gratefully expatiating on the inexhauſtible inſtances of the love of God to us, let it never forget to riſe to its moſt exalted pitch, to reſt on

its loftieſt object, *His ineſtimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jeſus Chriſt.* This is the crowning point; this is the gift which imparts their higheſt value to all his other giſts. It combines whatever can render divine munificence complete:—pardon of ſin, acceptance with God, perfection and perpetuity of bleſſedneſs. Well may the Chriſtian in the devout contemplation of this ſublime myſtery, which the higheſt of all created intelligences "deſire to look into," exclaim in grateful rapture, "Thou art the God that doeſt wonders!" A redeemed world is the triumph of infinity. Power and goodneſs, truth and mercy, righteouſneſs and peace, incorporated and loſt in each other!

Love is a grace of ſuch pre-eminent diſtinction, that the Redeemer is emphatically deſignated by it. To HIM THAT LOVED US. This is ſuch a characteriſtic ſtyle and title that no name is appended to it.

It muſt be an irkſome thing to ſerve a maſter whom we do not love; a maſter whom

we

we are compelled to obey, though we think his requiſitions hard, and his commands unreaſonable; under whoſe eye we know that we continually live, though his preſence is not only undelightful but formidable.

Now every creature muſt obey God, whether he love him or not; he muſt act always in his ſight, whether he delight in him or not; and to a heart of any feeling, to a ſpirit of any liberality, nothing is ſo grating as conſtrained obedience. To love God, to ſerve him becauſe we love him, is therefore no leſs our higheſt happineſs, than our moſt bounden duty. Love makes all labor light. We ſerve with alacrity, where we love with cordiality.

Where the heart is devoted to an object, we require not to be perpetually reminded of our obligations to obey him: they preſent themſelves ſpontaneouſly, we fulfil them readily, I had almoſt ſaid, involuntarily; we think not ſo much of the ſervice as of the object. The principle which ſuggeſts the work inſpires the pleaſure; to neglect it

would be an injury to our feelings. The performance is the gratification. The omiſſion is not more a pain to the conſcience, than a wound to the affections. The implantation of this vital root perpetuates virtuous practice, and ſecures internal peace.

Though we cannot be always thinking of God, we may be always employed in his ſervice. There muſt be intervals of our communion with him, but there muſt be no intermiſſion of our attachment to him. The tender father who labours for his children, does not always employ his thoughts about them; he cannot be always converſing with them, or concerning them, yet he is always engaged in promoting their intereſts. His affections for them is an inwoven principle, of which he gives the moſt unequivocal evidence, by the aſſiduouſneſs of his application in their ſervice.

"Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart," is the primary law of our Religion. Yet how apt are we to complain that we *cannot* love God, that we can-

not maintain a devout intercourſe with him. But would God, who is all juſtice, have commanded that of which he knew we were incapable? Would he who is all mercy have made our eternal happineſs to depend on ſomething which he knew was out of our power to perform, capriciouſly diſqualifying us for the duty he had preſcribed? Would he have given the exhortation, and withheld the capacity? This would be to charge Omniſcience with folly, and Infinite Goodneſs with injuſtice — no, when he made duty and happineſs inſeparable, he neither made our duty impracticable, nor our happineſs unattainable. But we are continually flying to falſe refuges, clinging to falſe holds, reſting on falſe ſupports: as they are uncertain they diſappoint us, as they are weak they fail us; but as they are numerous, when one fails, another preſents itſelf. Till they ſlip from under us, we never ſuſpect how much we reſted upon them. Life glides away in a perpetual ſucceſſion of theſe falſe dependencies and ſucceſſive privations.

Though we may be in a ſtate of acceptance with God, without thoſe feelings of joy and confidence which ſome conſider as the only evidences of ſafety, yet let us remember that theſe, though not indiſpenſable, are moſt deſirable characters of religion. Let us be patient if we do not poſſeſs ſuch a ſtate of mind, but let us never be ſatisfied not to deſire it. Let us eſpecially never reſt contented while ordinary amuſements, worldly events, pleaſing ſociety excite a feeling of delight which religion has never yet excited in us. Let us be humbled but not terrified, if it pleaſe God to withhold from us this "peace and joy in believing;" but let us feel a deep ſelf-abaſement to obſerve with what different ſenſations we receive the impreſſions which the pleaſures of ſenſe convey to us; that though from a principle of conſcience we follow up our religious exerciſes, yet that God only receives from us a duty of neceſſity and obligation, of coldneſs and conſtraint, while the worldly purſuits monopolize our pleaſurable feelings as well as our time and thoughts.

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There is, as we have elſewhere obſerved, a ſtriking analogy between the natural and ſpiritual life, the weakneſs and helpleſſneſs of the Chriſtian reſemble thoſe of the infant; neither of them becomes ſtrong, vigorous, and full grown at once, but through a long and often painful courſe. This keeps up a ſenſe of dependence, and accuſtoms us to lean on the hand which foſters us. There is in both conditions, an imperceptible chain of depending circumſtances, by which we are carried on inſenſibly to the vigour of maturity. The operation which is not always obvious, is always progreſſive. By attempting to walk alone, we diſcover our weakneſs, the experience of that weakneſs humbles us, and every fall drives us back to the ſuſtaining hand, whoſe aſſiſtance we vainly flattered ourſelves we no longer needed.

In ſome halcyon moments we are willing to perſuade ourſelves that Religion has made an entire conqueſt over our heart: that we have renounced the dominion of the

world, have conquered our attachment to earthly things. We flatter ourſelves that nothing can now again obſtruct our entire ſubmiſſion. But we know not what ſpirit we are of. We ſay this in the calm of repoſe and in the ſtillneſs of the paſſions; when our path is ſmooth, our proſpect ſmiling, danger diſtant, temptation abſent, when we have many comforts and no trials. Suddenly, ſome loſs, ſome diſappointment, ſome privation tears off the maſk, reveals us to ourſelves. We at once diſcover that though the ſmaller fibres and leſſer roots which faſten us down to earth may have been looſened by preceding ſtorms, yet our ſubſtantial hold on earth is not ſhaken, the tap root is not cut, we are yet faſt rooted to the ſoil, and ſtill ſtronger tempeſts muſt be ſent to make us let go our hold.

In all Academical Inſtitutions a broad foundation is provided, and a large ſtock of general preparatory ſtudy is propoſed to be laid in before it is determined to what particular profeſſion the ſtudent ſhall be called.

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The preliminary purſuits are afterwards convertible to ſuch individual purpoſes as may eventually ariſe. That ſtudent would be but indifferently qualified for his own profeſſion without this large initiatory baſis. The ſpiritual character ſhould be formed ſomewhat in the ſame manner with the intellectual. We muſt be prepared by a general previous diſcipline to meet all the diſpenſations of divine Providence, without knowing to what ſpecific trials and duties we may be called out. It is not enough therefore that we meet expected events with ſubmiſſion to the will of God; we muſt ſtrive after ſuch a general ſpirit of acquieſcence as ſhall fit us for thoſe that are unforeſeen. In ſuch a world as this, ſudden attacks, unlooked for aſſaults muſt be met with a ſpirit armed for the conflict. We ſhould live, not in the tormenting dread of indefinite evils, but with the expectation of their probable occurrence; for encountering which a ſtock of ſuperinduced ſtrength laid in by habitual prayer will be the only armour. We muſt not preſumptuouſly

tuouſly truſt for ſafety under trials to the reſiſtance we fancy we ſhall then be able to make, ſo much as to the collected forces of antecedent piety; for the grace of reſiſtance may be withheld where habits of piety have not been cultivated.

It might be uſeful to adopt the habit of ſtating our own caſe as ſtrongly to ourſelves as if it were the caſe of another; to expreſs in ſo many words, thoughts which are not apt to aſſume any ſpecific or palpable form; thoughts which we avoid ſhaping into language, but ſlur over, generalize, ſoften, and do away. How indignant, for inſtance, ſhould we feel (though we ourſelves make the complaint) to be told by others, that we do not love our Maker and Preſerver. But let us put the queſtion fairly to ourſelves. Do we really love him? Do we love him with a ſupreme, nay, even with an equal affection? Is there no friend, no child, no reputation, no pleaſure, no ſociety, no poſſeſſion which we do not prefer to him? It is eaſy to affirm in a general way that there

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is not. But let us particularize, individualize the queſtion—bring it home to our own hearts in ſome actual inſtance, in ſome tangible ſhape. Let us commune with our own conſciences, with our own feelings, with our own experience: let us queſtion pointedly, and anſwer honeſtly. Let us not be more aſhamed to detect the fault, than to have been guilty of it.

This then will commonly be the reſult. Let the friend, child, reputation, poſſeſſion, pleaſure be endangered, but eſpecially let it be taken away by ſome ſtroke of Providence. The ſcales fall from our eyes; we ſee, we feel, we acknowledge, with brokenneſs of heart, not only for our loſs, but for our ſin, that though we did love God, yet we loved him not ſuperlatively; that we loved the bleſſing, threatened or reſumed, ſtill more. But this is one of the caſes in which "the goodneſs of God bringeth us to repentance." By the operation of his grace the reſumption of the gift brings back the heart to the giver. The Almighty by his ſpirit takes

takes poſſeſſion of the Temple from which the idol is driven out: God is reinſtated in his rights, and becomes the ſupreme and undiſputed Lord of our reverential affection.

There are three requiſites to our proper enjoyment of every earthly bleſſing which Gods beſtows on us—a thankful reflection on the goodneſs of the giver, a deep ſenſe of the unworthineſs of the receiver, and a ſober recollection of the precarious tenure by which we hold it. The firſt would make us grateful, the ſecond humble, the laſt moderate.

But how ſeldom do we receive his favours in this ſpirit! As if religious gratitude were to be confined to the appointed days of public thankſgiving, how rarely in common ſociety do we hear any recognition of Omnipotence even on thoſe ſtriking and heart-rejoicing occaſions, when "with his own right hand, and with his holy arm, He has gotten himſelf the victory!" Let us never detract from the merit of our valiant leaders, but rather honour them the more

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for this manifeſtation of divine power in their favour; but let us never loſe ſight of Him "who teacheth their hands to war and their fingers to fight." Let us never forget that "He is the Rock, that his work is perfect, and all his ways are judgment."

How many ſeem to ſhow not only their want of affiance in God, but that "he is not in all their thoughts," by their appearing to leave him entirely out of their concerns, by projecting their affairs without any reference to him, by ſetting out on the ſtock of their own unaſſiſted wiſdom, contriving and acting independently of God; expecting proſperity in the event, without ſeeking his direction in the outſet, and taking to themſelves the whole honour of the ſucceſs without any recognition of his hand; do they not thus virtually imitate what Sophocles makes his bluſtering Atheiſt* boaſt. "Let other men expect to conquer with the aſſiſtance of the Gods, I intend to gain honour without them."

* Ajax.

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The Chriſtian will rather rejoice to aſcribe the glory of his proſperity to the ſame hand to which our own manly Queen gladly aſcribed her ſignal victory. When after the defeat of the Armada, impiouſly termed Invincible, her enemies, in order to lower the value of her agency, alleged that the victory was not owing to her, but to God who had raiſed the ſtorm, ſhe heroically declared that the viſible interference of God in her favour, was that part of the ſucceſs from which ſhe derived the trueſt honour.

Incidents and occaſions every day ariſe, which not only call on us to truſt in God, but which furniſh us with ſuitable occaſions of vindicating, if I may preſume to uſe the expreſſion, the character and conduct of the Almighty in the government of human affairs; yet there is no duty which we perform with leſs alacrity. Strange, that we ſhould treat the Lord of heaven and earth with leſs confidence than we exerciſe towards each other! That we ſhould vindicate the honour of a common acquaintance with more zeal

than

than that of our inſulted Maker and Preſerver!

If we hear a friend accuſed of any act of injuſtice, though we cannot bring any poſitive proof why he ſhould be acquitted of this ſpecific charge, yet we reſent the injury offered to his character; we clear him of the individual allegation on the ground of his general conduct, inferring that from the numerous inſtances we can produce of his rectitude on other occaſions, he cannot be guilty of the alleged injuſtice. We reaſon from analogy, and in general we reaſon fairly. But when we preſume to judge of the Moſt High, inſtead of vindicating his rectitude on the ſame grounds, under a Providence ſeemingly ſevere; inſtead of reverting, as in the caſe of our friend, to the thouſand inſtances we have formerly taſted of his kindneſs, inſtead of giving God the ſame credit we give to his erring creature, and inferring from his paſt goodneſs, that the preſent inexplicable diſpenſation muſt be conſiſtent, though we cannot explain how,

with

with his general character, we mutinouſly accuſe him of inconſiſtency, nay of injuſtice. We admit virtually the moſt monſtrous anomaly in the character of the perfect God.

But what a clue has Revelation furniſhed to the intricate labyrinth which ſeems to involve the conduct which we impiouſly queſtion! It unrols the volume of Divine Providence, lays open the myſterious map of infinite wiſdom, throws a bright light on the darkeſt diſpenſations, vindicates the inequality of appearances, and points to that bleſſed region, where to all who have truly loved and ſerved God, every apparent wrong ſhall be proved to have been unimpeachably right, every affliction a mercy, and the ſevereſt trials the choiceſt bleſſings.

So blind has ſin made us, that the glory of God is concealed from us, by the very means which, could we diſcern aright, would diſplay it. That train of ſecond cauſes, which he has ſo marvellouſly diſpoſed, obſtructs our view of himſelf. We are ſo filled with wonder at the immediate effect,

that

that our ſhort ſight penetrates not to the firſt cauſe. To ſee him as he is, is reſerved to be the happineſs of a better world. We ſhall then indeed "admire him in his Saints, and in all them that believe;" we ſhall ſee how neceſſary it was for thoſe whoſe bliſs is now ſo perfect, to have been poor, and deſpiſed, and oppreſſed. We ſhall ſee why the "ungodly were in ſuch proſperity." Let us give God credit here for what we ſhall then fully know; let us adore now, what we ſhall underſtand hereafter.

They who take up Religion on a falſe ground will never adhere to it. If they adopt it merely for the peace and pleaſantneſs it brings, they will deſert it as ſoon as they find their adherence to it will bring them into difficulty, diſtreſs, or diſcredit. It ſeldom anſwers therefore to attempt making proſelytes by hanging out falſe colours. The Chriſtian "endures as ſeeing him who is inviſible." He who adopts Religion for the ſake of immediate enjoyment, will not do a virtuous action that is diſagreeable

able to himſelf; nor reſiſt a temptation that is alluring, preſent pleaſure being his motive. There is no ſure baſis for virtue but the love of God in Chriſt Jeſus, and the bright reverſion for which that love is pledged. Without this, as ſoon as the paths of piety become rough and thorny, we ſhall ſtray into pleaſanter paſtures.

Religion however has her own peculiar advantages. In the tranſactions of all worldly affairs, there are many and great difficulties. There may be ſeveral ways out of which to chuſe. Men of the firſt underſtanding are not always certain which of theſe ways is the beſt. Perſons of the deepeſt penetration are full of doubt and perplexity; their minds are undecided how to act, leſt while they purſue one road, they may be neglecting another, which might better have conducted them to their propoſed end.

In Religion the caſe is different, and in this reſpect, eaſy. As a Chriſtian can have but one object in view, he is alſo certain there is but one way of attaining it. Where

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there is but one end it prevents all poſſibility of chuſing wrong, where there is but one road it takes away all perplexity as to the courſe of purſuit. That we ſo often wander wide of the mark, is not from any want of plainneſs in the path, but from the perverſeneſs of our will in not chuſing it, from the indolence of our minds in not following it up.

In our attachments to earthly things even the moſt innocent, there is always a danger of exceſs, but from this danger we are here perfectly exempt, for there is no poſſibility of exceſs in our love to that Being who has demanded *the Whole heart*. This peremptory requiſition cuts off all debate. Had God required only a portion, even were it a large portion, we might be puzzled in ſettling the quantum. We might be plotting how large a part we might venture to keep back without abſolutely forfeiting our ſafety; we might be haggling for deductions, bargaining for abatements, and be perpetually compromiſing with our

Maker. But the injunction is entire, the command is definite, the portion is unequivocal. Though it is ſo compreſſed in the expreſſion, yet it is ſo expanſive and ample in the meaſure; it is ſo diſtinct a claim, ſo imperative a requiſition of *all* the faculties of the mind, and ſtrength; *all* the affections of the heart and ſoul; that there is not the leaſt opening left for litigation; no place for any thing but abſolute unreſerved compliance. But though our love of God can never be exceſſive in the degree, yet the expreſſion of that love may be indiſcreet, the exerciſe of it may be eccentric. We may debaſe that which is noble by low and puerile language; we may tarniſh that which is pure by groſſneſs; and diſorder it by irregularity. Though the principle may be ſound there may be illuſion in its application. Our love muſt operate in ſuch inſtances as God has commanded, and not in ſuch as ſuperſtition has deviſed or enthuſiaſm invented. The pure fountain muſt not be polluted with earthly infuſions; the

expreſſion

expreſſion of our love to our heavenly Father muſt not be degraded by images borrowed from human paſſions, nor diſhonoured by ideas, nor rendered groſsly familiar by phraſes which are ſcarcely pardonable even when applied to thoſe paſſions.

Every thing which relates to God is infinite. We muſt therefore, while we keep our hearts humble, keep our aims high. Our higheſt ſervices indeed are but finite, imperfect. But as God is unlimited in goodneſs, he ſhould have our unlimited love. The beſt we can offer is poor, but let us not withhold that beſt. He deſerves incomparably more than we have to give, let us not give him leſs than all. If he has ennobled our corrupt nature with ſpiritual affections, let us not refuſe them nobleſt aſpirations, to their nobleſt object. Let him not behold us ſo prodigally laviſhing our affections for the meaneſt of his bounties, as to have nothing left for himſelf. As the ſtandard of every thing in religion is high, let us endeavour to act in it with the higheſt

intention of mind, with the largeſt uſe of our faculties. Let us obey him with the moſt intenſe love, adore him with the moſt fervent gratitude. Let us "praiſe him according to his excellent greatneſs." Let us ſerve him with all the ſtrength of our capacity, with all the devotion of our will.

Grace being a new principle added to our natural powers, as it determines the deſires to a higher object, ſo it adds vigour to their activity. We ſhall beſt prove its dominion over us by deſiring to exert ourſelves in the cauſe of Heaven with the ſame energy with which we once exerted ourſelves in the cauſe of the world. The world was too little to fill our whole capacity. Scaliger lamented how much was loſt becauſe ſo fine a poet as Claudian, in his choice of a ſubject, wanted matter worthy of his talents: but it is the felicity of the Chriſtian to have choſen a theme to which all the powers of his heart and of his underſtanding will be found inadequate. It is the glory of religion to ſupply an object worthy of the entire conſecra-

tion of every power, faculty, and affection of an immaterial, immortal being.—Chriſtianity demands the energies of the entire man; its worſhip the choiceſt portion of his time; its doctrines the ſtrenuous exertion of his intellectual powers; its duties the ſtretch and compaſs of his wideſt endeavours; its truths the higheſt exerciſe of his faith; its promiſes of his hopes. It preſents objects commenſurate to thoſe large capacities, and inextinguiſhable deſires which God gave him when he provided a bleſſedneſs ſo worthy to fill and ſatisfy them.

CHAP. VIII.

The Hand of God to be acknowledged in the daily Circumſtances of Life.

IF we would indeed love God let us "acquaint ourſelves with him." The word of inſpiration has aſſured us that there is no other way to "be at peace." As we cannot love an unknown God, ſo neither can we know him, or even approach toward that knowledge, but on the terms which he himſelf holds out to us; neither will he ſave us but in the method which he has himſelf preſcribed. His very perfections, the juſt objects of our adoration, all ſtand in the way of creatures ſo guilty. His juſtice is the flaming ſword which excludes us from the Paradiſe we have forfeited. His purity is ſo oppoſed to our corruptions, his omnipotence to our infirmity, his wiſdom to our folly, that had we not to plead the great propitiation, thoſe very attributes which are now our truſt, would

would be our terror. The moſt oppoſite images of human conception, the wideſt extremes of human language, are uſed for the purpoſe of ſhewing what God is to us, in our natural ſtate, and what he is under the Chriſtian diſpenſation. The "conſuming fire" is transformed into eſſential "love."

But as we cannot find out the Almighty to perfection, ſo we cannot love him with that pure flame which animates glorified ſpirits. But there is a preliminary acquaintance with him, an initial love of him, for which he has furniſhed us with means by his works, by his word, and by his Spirit. Even in this bleak and barren ſoil ſome germs will ſhoot, ſome bloſſoms will open, of that celeſtial plant, which watered by the dews of heaven, and ripened by the Sun of Righteouſneſs, will, in a more genial clime, expand into the fulneſs of perfection, and bear immortal fruits in the Paradiſe of God.

A perſon of a cold phlegmatic temper, who laments that he wants that fervour in his love of the Supreme Being, which is apparent

in more ardent characters, may take comfort, if he find the ſame indifference reſpecting his worldly attachments. But if his affections are intenſe towards the periſhable things of earth, while they are dead to ſuch as are ſpiritual, it does not prove that he is deſtitute of paſſions, but only that they are not directed to the proper object. If however he love God with that meaſure of feeling with which God has endowed him, he will not be puniſhed or rewarded becauſe the ſtock is greater or ſmaller than that of ſome other of his fellow-creatures.

In thoſe intervals when our ſenſe of divine things is weak and low, we muſt not give way to diſtruſt, but warm our hearts with the recollection of our beſt moments. Our motives to love and gratitude are not now diminiſhed, but our ſpiritual frame is lower, our natural ſpirits are weaker. Where there is langour there will be diſcouragements. But we muſt not deſiſt. "Faint yet purſuing" muſt be the Chriſtian's motto.

There is more merit (if ever we dare apply

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ſo arrogant a word to our worthleſs efforts) in perſevering under depreſſion and diſcomfort, than in the happieſt flow of devotion, when the tide of health and ſpirits runs high. Where there is leſs gratification there is more diſintereſtedneſs. We ought to conſider it as a cheering evidence, that our love may be equally pure though it is not equally fervent, when we perſiſt in ſerving our heavenly Father with the ſame conſtancy, though it may pleaſe him to withdraw from us the ſame conſolations. Perſeverance may bring us to the very diſpoſitions the abſence of which we are lamenting.—" O tarry thou the Lord's leiſure, be ſtrong and he ſhall comfort thy heart."

We are too ready to imagine that we are religious becauſe we know ſomething of religion. We appropriate to ourſelves the pious ſentiments we read, and we talk as if the thoughts of other men's heads were really the feeling of our own hearts. But piety has not its ſeat in the memory, but in

the affections, for which however the memory is an excellent purveyor, though a bad ſubſtitute. Inſtead of an undue elation of heart when we peruſe ſome of the Pſalmiſt's beautiful effuſions, we ſhould feel a deep ſelf-abaſement at the reflection, that however our caſe may ſometimes reſemble his, yet how inapplicable to our hearts are the ardent expreſſions of his repentance, the overflowing of his gratitude, the depth of his ſubmiſſion, the entireneſs of his ſelf-dedication, the fervor of his love. But he who indeed can once ſay with him "Thou art my portion," will like him ſurrender himſelf unreſervedly to his ſervice.

It is important that we never ſuffer our faith, any more than our love, to be depreſſed or elevated, by miſtaking for its own operations, the ramblings of a buſy imagination. The ſteady principle of faith muſt not look for its character, to the vagaries of a mutable and fantaſtic Fancy—*La folle de la Maiſon*, as ſhe has been well denominated.

Faith

Faith which has once fixed her foot on the immutable rock of ages, faſtened her firm eye on the croſs, and ſtretched out her triumphant hand to ſeize the promiſed crown, will not ſuffer her ſtability to depend on this ever-ſhifting faculty; ſhe will not be driven to deſpair, by the blackeſt ſhades of its pencil, nor be betrayed into a careleſs ſecurity, by its moſt flattering and vivid colours.

One cauſe of the fluctuations of our faith is, that we are too ready to judge the Almighty by our own low ſtandard. We judge him not by his own declarations of what he is, and what he will do, but by our own feelings and practices. We ourſelves are too little diſpoſed to forgive thoſe who have offended us. We therefore conclude that God cannot pardon our offences. We ſuſpect him to be implacable becauſe we are apt to be ſo, and we are unwilling to believe that he can paſs by injuries, becauſe we find it ſo hard to do it. When we do forgive, it is grudgingly and ſuperficially; we there-

fore infer that God cannot forgive freely and fully. We make a hypocritical diſtinction between forgiving and forgetting injuries. God clears away the ſcore when he grants the pardon. He does not only ſay, "thy ſins and thy iniquities will I forgive," but "I will *remember* no more."

We are diſpoſed to urge the ſmallneſs of our offences, as a plea for their forgiveneſs; whereas God, to exhibit the boundleſſneſs of his own mercy, has taught us to alledge a plea directly contrary, "Lord, pardon my iniquity, for it is *great*." To natural reaſon this argument of David is moſt extraordinary. But while he felt that the greatneſs of his own iniquity left him no reſource, but in the mercy of God, he felt that God's mercy was greater even than his own ſin. What a large, what a magnificent idea, does it give us of the divine power and goodneſs that the believer, inſtead of pleading the ſmallneſs of his own offences as a motive for pardon, pleads only the abundance of the Divine compaſſion!

We

We are told that it is the duty of the Chriſtian to "ſeek God." We aſſent to the truth of the propoſition. Yet it would be leſs irkſome to corrupt nature, in purſuit of this knowledge, to go a pilgrimage to diſtant lands, than to ſeek him within our own hearts. Our own heart is the true *terra incognita*; a land more foreign and unknown to us, than the regions of the polar circle: yet that heart is the place, in which an acquaintance with God muſt be ſought. It is there we muſt worſhip him, if we would worſhip him in ſpirit and in truth.

But, alas! the heart is not the home of a worldly man, it is ſcarcely the home of a Chriſtian. If buſineſs and pleaſure are the natural element of the generality; a dreary vacuity, ſloth, and inſenſibility, too often worſe than both, diſincline, diſqualify too many Chriſtians for the purſuit.

I have obſerved, and I think I have heard others obſerve, that a common beggar had rather ſcreen himſelf under the wall of a churchyard, if overtaken by a ſhower of rain, though

though the church-doors ſtand invitingly open, than take ſhelter within it, while Divine ſervice is performing. It is a leſs annoyance to him to be drenched with the ſtorm, than to enjoy the convenience of a ſhelter and a ſeat, if he muſt enjoy them at the heavy price of liſtening to the Sermon.

While we condemn the beggar, let us look into our own hearts; happy if we cannot there detect ſomewhat of the ſame indolence, indiſpoſedneſs, and diſtaſte to ſerious things! Happy, if we do not find, that we prefer not only our pleaſure and enjoyments, but, I had almoſt ſaid, our very pains, and vexations, and inconveniences, to communing with our Maker! Happy, if we had not rather be abſorbed in our petty cares, and little diſturbances, provided we can contrive to make them the means of occupying our thoughts, filling up our minds, and drawing them away from that devout intercourſe, which demands the livelieſt exercise of our rational powers, the higheſt

elevation

elevation of our ſpiritual affections! Is it not to be apprehended, that the dread of being driven to this ſacred intercourſe, is one grand cauſe of that activity, and reſtleſſneſs, which ſets the world in ſuch perpetual motion?

Though we are ready to expreſs a general ſenſe of our confidence in Almighty goodneſs, yet what definite meaning do we annex to the expreſſion? What practical evidences have we to produce, that we really do truſt him? Does this truſt deliver us from worldly anxiety? Does it exonerate us from the ſame perturbation of ſpirit, which thoſe endure who make no ſuch profeſſion? Does it relieve the mind from doubt and diſtruſt? Does it tranquillize the troubled heart, does it regulate its diſorders, and compoſe its fluctuations? Does it ſooth us under irritation? Does it ſupport us under trials? Does it fortify us againſt temptations? Does it lead us to repoſe a full confidence in that Being whom we profeſs to truſt? Does it produce in us

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"that work of righteouſneſs which is peace," that effect of righteouſneſs, which is "quietneſs and aſſurance for ever?" Do we commit ourſelves and our concerns to God in word, or in reality? Does this implicit reliance ſimplify our deſires? Does it induce us to credit the teſtimony of his word and the promiſes of his Goſpel? Do we not even entertain ſome ſecret ſuſpicions of his faithfulneſs and truth in our hearts, when we perſuade others and try to perſuade ourſelves that we unreſervedly truſt him?

In the preceding Chapter we endeavoured to illuſtrate our want of Love to God by our not being as forward to *vindicate* the divine conduct as to juſtify that of an acquaintance. The ſame illuſtration may expreſs our reluctance to *truſt* in God. If a tried friend engage to do us a kindneſs, though he may not think it neceſſary to explain the particular manner in which he intends to do it, we repoſe on his word. Aſſured of the reſult, we are neither very inquiſitive about the mode nor the detail. But do we

treat

treat our Almighty friend with the ſame liberal confidence? Are we not murmuring becauſe we cannot ſee all the proceſs of his adminiſtration, and follow his movements ſtep by ſtep? Do we wait the developement of his plan, in full aſſurance that the iſſue will be ultimately good? Do we truſt that he is as abundantly willing as able to do more for us than we can aſk or think, if by our ſuſpicions we do not offend him, if by our infidelity we do not provoke him? In ſhort do we not think ourſelves utterly undone, when we have only Providence to truſt to?

We are perhaps ready enough to acknowledge God in our mercies, nay, we confeſs him in the ordinary enjoyments of life. In ſome of theſe common mercies, as in a bright day, a refreſhing ſhower, delightful ſcenery; a kind of ſenſitive pleaſure, an hilarity of ſpirits, a ſort of animal enjoyment, though of a refined nature, mixes itſelf with our devotional feelings; and though we confeſs and adore the bountiful Giver,

we

we do it with a little mixture of self-complacency, and of human gratification, which he pardons and accepts.

But we muſt look for him in ſcenes leſs animating, we muſt acknowledge him on occaſions leſs exhilarating, leſs ſenſibly gratifying. It is not only in his promiſes that God manifeſts his mercy. His threatenings are proofs of the ſame compaſſionate love. He threatens, not to puniſh, but by the warning, to ſnatch from the puniſhment.

We may alſo trace marks of his hand not only in the awful viſitations of life, not only in the ſeverer diſpenſations of his Providence, but in vexations ſo trival that we ſhould heſitate to ſuſpect that they are Providential appointments, did we not know that our daily life is made up of unimportant circumſtances rather than of great events. As they are however of ſufficient importance to exerciſe the Chriſtian tempers and affections, we may trace the hand of our heavenly father in thoſe daily little diſappointments, and hourly vexations, which occur even in the

the moſt proſperous ſtate, and which are inſeparable from the condition of humanity. We muſt trace that ſame beneficent hand, ſecretly at work for our purification, our correction, our weaning from life, in the imperfections and diſagreeableneſs of thoſe who may be about us, in the perverſeneſs of thoſe with whom we tranſact buſineſs, and in thoſe interruptions which break in on our favourite engagements.

We are perhaps too much addicted to our innocent delights, or we are too fond of our leiſure, of our learned, even of our religious leiſure. But while we ſay, "it is good for us to be here," the divine viſion is withdrawn, and we are compelled to come down from the mount. Or, perhaps, we do not improve our retirement for the purpoſes for which it was granted, and to which we had reſolved to devote it, and our time is broken in upon to make us more ſenſible of its value. Or we feel a complacency in our retirement, a pride in our books; perhaps we feel proud of the good things we are intending

tending to ſay, or meditating to write, or preparing to do. A check is neceſſary, yet it is given in a way almoſt imperceptible. The hand that gives it is unſeen, is unſuſpected, yet it is the ſame gracious hand which directs the moſt important events of life. An importunate application, a diſqualifying though not ſevere indiſpoſition, a family avocation, a letter important to the writer, but unſeaſonable to us, breaks in on our projected privacy; calls us to a ſacrifice of our inclination, to a renunciation of our own will. Theſe inceſſant trials of temper, if well improved, may be more ſalutary to the mind, than the fineſt paſſage we had intended to read, or the ſublimeſt ſentiment we had fancied we ſhould write.

Inſtead then of going in ſearch of great mortifications, as a certain claſs of pious writers recommend, let us cheerfully bear, and diligently improve theſe inferior trials which God prepares for us. Submiſſion to a croſs which he inflicts, to a diſappointment which he ſends, to a contradiction of our ſelf-love,

which

which he appoints, is a far better exercise, than great penances of our own chusing. Perpetual conquests over impatience, ill-temper, and self-will, indicate a better spirit than any self-imposed mortifications. We may traverse oceans and scale mountains on uncommanded pilgrimages, without pleasing God; we may please him without any other exertion than by crossing our own will.

Perhaps you had been busying your imagination with some projected scheme, not only lawful but laudable. The design was radically good, but the supposed value of your own agency, might too much interfere, might a little taint the purity of your best intentions. The motives were so mixed that it was difficult to separate them. Sudden sickness obstructed the design. You naturally lament the failure, not perceiving that, however good the work might be for others, the sickness was better for yourself. An act of charity was in your intention, but God saw that your soul required the exercise

of

of a more difficult virtue; that humility and reſignation, that the patience, acquieſcence, and contrition of a ſick bed, were more neceſſary for you. He accepts the meditated work as far as it was deſigned for his glory, but he calls his ſervant to other duties, which were more ſalutary for him, and of which the maſter was the better judge. He ſets aſide his work, and orders him to wait; the more difficult part of his taſk. As far as your motive was pure, you will receive the reward of your unperformed charity, though not the gratification of the performance. If it was not pure, you are reſcued from the danger attending a right action performed on a worldly principle. You may be the better Chriſtian though one good deed is ſubtracted from your catalogue.

By a life of activity and uſefulneſs, you had perhaps attracted the public eſteem. An animal activity had partly ſtimulated your exertions. The love of reputation begins to mix itſelf with your better motives. You do not, it is preſumed, act entirely, or

chiefly for human applauſe; but you are too ſenſible to it. It is a delicious poiſon which begins to infuſe itſelf into your pureſt cup. You acknowledge indeed the ſublimity of higher motives, but do you never feel that, ſeparated from this accompaniment of ſelf, they would be too abſtracted, too ſpeculative, and might become too little productive both of activity and of ſenſible gratification? You begin to feel the human incentive neceſſary, and your ſpirits would probably flag if it were withdrawn.

This ſenſibility to praiſe would gradually tarniſh the purity of your beſt actions. He who ſees your heart, as well as your works, mercifully ſnatches you from the perils of proſperity. Malice is awakened. Your moſt meritorious actions are aſcribed to the moſt corrupt motives. You are attacked juſt where your character is leaſt vulnerable. The enemies whom your ſucceſs raiſed up, are raiſed up by God, leſs to puniſh than to ſave you. We are far from meaning that he can ever be the author of evil; he does

not

not excite or approve the calumny, but he uſes your calumniators as inſtruments of your purification. Your fame was too dear to you. It is a coſtly ſacrifice, but God requires it. It muſt be offered up. You would gladly compound for any, for every other offering, but this is the offering he chuſes: and while he graciouſly continues to employ you for his glory, he thus teaches you to renounce your own. He ſends this trial as a teſt by which you are to try yourſelf. He thus inſtructs you not to abandon your Chriſtian exertions, but to elevate the principle which inſpired them, to defecate it from all impure admixtures.

By thus ſtripping the moſt engaging employments of this dangerous delight, by infuſing ſome drops of ſalutary bitterneſs into your ſweeteſt draught, by ſome of theſe ill-taſted but wholeſome mercies, he graciouſly compels us to return to himſelf. By taking away the ſtays by which we are perpetually propping up our frail delights, they fall to the ground. We are, as it were, driven back

back to Him, who condeſcends to receive us, after we have tried every thing elſe, and after every thing elſe has failed us, and though he knows we ſhould not have returned to him if every thing elſe had *not* failed us. He makes us feel our weakneſs, that we may have recourſe to his ſtrength, he makes us ſenſible of our hitherto unperceived ſins, that we may take refuge in his everlaſting compaſſion.

CHAP. IX.

Chriſtianity univerſal in its Requiſitions.

IT is not unuſual to ſee people get rid of ſome of the moſt awful injunctions, and emancipate themſelves from ſome of the moſt ſolemn requiſitions of Scripture, by affecting to believe that they do not apply to . . . They conſider them as belonging excluſively to the firſt age of the Goſpel, and to the individuals to whom they were immediately addreſſed; conſequently the neceſſity to obſerve them does not extend to perſons under an eſtabliſhed Chriſtian, or hereditary Chriſtians.

Theſe exceptions are particularly applied to ſome of the leading doctrines, ſo forcibly and repeatedly preſſed in the Epiſtles. The perſons endeavour to perſuade themſelves that it was only the Epheſians "who were dead in treſpaſſes and ſins"—that it

was

was only the Galatians who were enjoined "not to fulfil the luſts of the fleſh"—that it was only the Philippians who were "enemies to the Croſs of Chriſt." They ſhelter themſelves under the comfortable aſſurance of a geographical ſecurity. As they know that they are neither Epheſians, Galatians, nor Philippians, they have, of courſe, little or nothing to do with the reproofs, expoſtulations, or threatenings which were originally directed to the converts among thoſe people. They conſole themſelves with the belief that it was only the Pagans who "walked according to the courſe of this world"—who were "ſtrangers from the covenants of promiſe"—"and who were without God in the world."

But theſe ſelf-ſatisfied critics would do well to learn that not only "circumciſion nor uncircumciſion," but baptiſm or no baptiſm "availeth nothing" (I mean as a mere form), "but a new creature." An irreligious profeſſor of Chriſtianity is as much "a ſtranger and foreigner," as a heathen;

he is no more "a fellow citizen of the Saints," and of the houſehold of God, "than a Coloſſian or Galatian was, before the Chriſtian diſpenſation had reached them."

But if the perſons to whom the Apoſtles preached had, before their converſion, no vices to which we are not liable, they had certainly difficulties afterwards from which we are happily exempt. There were indeed differences between them and us in external ſituations, in local circumſtances, references to which we ought certainly to take into the account in peruſing the Epiſtles. We allow that they were immediately, but we do not allow that they were excluſively, applicable to them. It would have been too limited an object for inſpiration to have confined its inſtructions to any one period, when its purpoſe was the converſion and inſtruction of the whole unborn world. That theſe converts were miraculouſly "called out of darkneſs into the marvellous light of the Goſpel"—that they were changed from groſs blindneſs to a rapid illumination—

that

that the embracing the new faith expoſed them to perſecution, reproach and ignominy —that the few had to ſtruggle againſt the world—that laws, principalities and powers which ſupport our faith oppoſed theirs—theſe are diſtinctions of which we ought not to loſe ſight: nor ſhould we forget that not only all the diſadvantages lay on their ſide in their antecedent condition, but that alſo all the ſuperiority lies on ours in that which is ſubſequent.

But however the condition of the external ſtate of the Church might differ, there can be no neceſſity for any difference in the interior ſtate of the individual Chriſtian. On whatever high principles of devotedneſs to God and love to man, *they* were called to act, we are called to act on preciſely the ſame, if their faith was called to more painful exertions, if their ſelf-denial to harder ſacrifices, if their renunciation of earthly things to ſeverer trials, let us thankfully remember this would naturally be the caſe, at the firſt introduction of a religion which

had to combat with the pride, prejudices, and enmity of corrupt nature, inveſted with temporal power:—that the hoſtile party would not fail to perceive how much the new religion oppoſed itſelf to their corruptions, and that it was introducing a ſpirit which was in direct and avowed hoſtility to the ſpirit of the world.

But while we are deeply thankful for the diminiſhed difficulties of an eſtabliſhed faith, let us never forget that Chriſtianity allows of no diminution in the temper, of no abatement in the ſpirit, which conſtituted a Chriſtian in the firſt ages of the Church.

Chriſtianity is preciſely the ſame religion now as it was when our Saviour was upon earth. The ſpirit of the world is exactly the ſame now as it was then. And if the moſt eminent of the Apoſtles, under the immediate guidance of inſpiration, were driven to lament their conflicts with their own corrupt nature, the power of temptation, combining with their natural propenſities to evil, how can we expect that a lower

faith,

faith, a ſlackened zeal, an abated diligence, and an inferior holineſs will be accepted in *us?* Believers *then*, were not called to higher degrees of purity, to a more elevated devotion, to a deeper humility, to a greater rectitude, patience, and ſincerity, than they are called to in the age in which we live. The promiſes are not limited to the period in which they were made, the aid of the Spirit is not confined to thoſe on whom it was firſt poured out. It was expreſsly declared, by St. Peter on its firſt effuſion, to be promiſed not only "to them and to their children, but to all who were afar off, even to as many as the Lord their God ſhould call."

If then the ſame ſalvation be now offered as was offered at firſt, is it not obvious that it muſt be worked out in the ſame way? And as the ſame Goſpel retains the ſame authority in all ages, ſo does it maintain the ſame univerſality among all ranks. Chriſtianity has no bye-laws, no particular exemptions, no individual immunities. That there is no appropriate way of attaining

ſalvation for a prince or a philoſopher, is probably one reaſon why greatneſs and wiſdom have ſo often rejected it. But if rank cannot plead its privileges, genius cannot claim its diſtinctions. That Chriſtianity did not owe its ſucceſs to the arts of rhetoric or the ſophiſtry of the ſchools, but that God intended by it "to make fooliſh the wiſdom of this world," actually explains why "the diſputers of this world" have always been its enemies.

It would have been unworthy of the infinite God to have imparted a partial religion. There is but one "gate," and that a "ſtrait" one; but one "way," and that a "narrow" one; there is but one ſalvation, and that a common one. The Goſpel enjoins the ſame principles of love and obedience on all of every condition; offers the ſame aids under the ſame exigencies; the ſame ſupports under all trials; the ſame pardon to all penitents; the ſame Saviour to all believers; the ſame rewards to all who "endure to the end." The temptations of

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one condition and the trials of another may call for the exercise of different qualities, for the performance of different duties, but the same personal holiness is enjoined on all. External acts of virtue may be promoted by some circumstances, and impeded by others, but the graces of inward piety are of universal force, are of eternal obligation.

The universality of its requisitions is one of its most distinguishing characteristics. In the Pagan world it seemed sufficient that a few exalted spirits, a few fine geniuses, should soar to a vast superiority above the mass; but it was never expected that the mob of Rome or Athens should aspire to any religious sentiments or feelings in common with Socrates or Epictetus. I say *religious* sentiments, because in matters of taste the distinctions were less striking, for the mob of Athens were competent critics in the dramatic art, while they were sunk in the most stupid and degrading idolatry. As to those of a higher class, while no subject in science, arts, or learning was too lofty or too abstruse

for their acquiſition, no object in nature was too low, no conception of a depraved imagination was too impure for their worſhip. While the civil and political wiſdom of the Romans was carried to ſuch perfection that their Code of Laws has ſtill a place in the moſt enlightened countries, their deplorably groſs ſuperſtitions rank them in point of religion with the Savages of Africa. It ſhews how little a way that reaſon which manifeſted itſelf with ſuch unrivalled vigour in their Poets, Orators, and Hiſtorians, as to make them ſtill models to ours, could go in what related to religion, when theſe poliſhed people in the objects of their worſhip are only on a par with the inhabitants of Otaheite.

It furniſhes the moſt incontrovertible proof that the world by wiſdom knew not God, that it was at the very time, and in the very country, in which knowledge and taſte had attained their utmoſt perfection, when the Porch and the Academy had given laws to human intellect, that Atheiſm firſt aſſumed

a ſhape,

a ſhape, and eſtabliſhed itſelf into a ſchool of Philoſophy. It was at the moment when the mental powers were carried to the higheſt pitch in Greece, that it was ſettled as an infallible truth in this Philoſophy that the *ſenſes were the higheſt natural light of mankind.* It was in the moſt enlightened age of Rome that this Atheiſtical Philoſophy was tranſplanted thither, and that one of her moſt elegant Poets adopted it, and rendered it popular by the bewitching graces of his verſe.

It has been intimated with a view to depreciate Chriſtianity by thoſe who are offended at her humbling doctrines, that the heathen philoſophers had given ſufficient exaltation to the human character; that they exhibited an elevation of ſentiment, and a dignity of virtue, which left nothing to deſire on the ſide of moral excellence. This is meant to convey an oblique inſinuation that the Chriſtian revelation might have been diſpenſed with.

Chriſtianity would gain no freſh honours by ſtripping thoſe noble writers of their

ſplendid trophies. We muſt acknowledge that we are frequently aſtoniſhed at the heights they reached. We may bluſh to ſee ſo much grandeur of conception, and rectitude of ſentiment, where there was ſuch an abſence of illumination.

But thoſe who give this tacit preference, do not ſeem to feel where the grand characteriſtic difference lies. The turning point which ſeparates Chriſtianity from all the other religions in the world eſcapes their obſervation. The dignity of the letter of Pagan virtue, and of the ſpirit of Chriſtian virtue, is of a totally oppoſite character. The foundation is different, the views are different, the end is different. The one fills man with a perfect complacency in his own perfections: it is the object of the other to ſtrip him of every boaſt. The one ſwells him with ſatisfaction at the conſciouſneſs of his own attainments; the other teaches him never to "count himſelf to have attained:" a feeling of imperfection accompanies him in his beſt actions, and never forſakes him in

his higheſt advancements. The one makes the proficient in virtue rich in his own independent worth; the other "brings every thought into captivity to the obedience of Chriſt." The one glories in the victory his ſelf-denial has obtained; the other, after his higher conqueſts, exclaims, "God forbid that I ſhould glory, ſave in the Croſs of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt."—Philoſophy not ſeldom carried its profeſſor to ſuch an elevation that he roſe above riches, above honours, above the world; but it never enabled him to riſe above *himſelf*. It never raiſed its votary to owe his ſatisfaction, his happineſs, his independence, to any thing without him, or above him. He borrows nothing, he derives nothing, all is his own. Outward temptations are combated, even inward propenſities are reſiſted, the world is degraded, but *ſelf* is enthroned. He labours to be virtuous, and to a certain degree he obtains his object, but his virtue, that is himſelf, is every thing to him.

The Chriſtian's career is more difficult, and leſs dazzling. He is not only commanded

"not

" not to love the world nor the things of the world," he is called to a harder renunciation: he muſt renounce all dependence on the virtues of which he dares not neglect the performance. If the philoſopher deſpiſed the world, this contempt was founded in pride, and was a homage to his own virtue. As to the Chriſtian, " the world is crucified to him and he to the world," on a principle ſo abaſing, that natural wiſdom revolts at it; the humbling principle of " the croſs of Chriſt." The ſage who feaſted on the plenitude of his own perfections would think it a mortifying exchange to be " filled with the fulneſs" of any other being, though that being was " God." How would the man whoſe heart was overflowing with a ſenſe of his own value endure that injunction to ſocial kindneſs, " look not every man on his own things, but every man alſo on the things of others?"—" Let every man eſteem others more than himſelf." would have been accounted the dictate of folly where ſelf-eſtimation was the actuating principle.

Humility,

Humility, which forms the very baſis of the Chriſtian character, is ſo far from making a part of the code of philoſophy, that it was "againſt the canon law of their foundation." Not only no ſuch quality has a place in their ethics, but it was philologically, as well as morally degraded; the very term expreſſing not virtue but baſeneſs.

As coming from the founder of a ſchool, indeed, they might have adopted the maxim "let this mind be in you which was in Chriſt Jeſus;" but the clauſe—"who made himſelf of no reputation," ſtrips it of its value. "This is a hard ſaying," which of them could hear it?

It ſeems as if the moſt accompliſhed nations ſtood in the moſt preſſing need of the light of Revelation; for it was not to the dark and ſtupid corners of the earth that the Apoſtles had their earlieſt miſſions. One of St. Paul's firſt and nobleſt expoſitions of Chriſtian Truth was made before the moſt auguſt deliberative aſſembly in the world, though, by the way, it does not appear that

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more than one member of Areopagus was converted. In Rome ſome of the Apoſtle's earlieſt converts belonged to the Imperial Palace.—It was to the metropolis of cultivated Italy, it was to the poliſhed "regions of Achaia," to the opulent and luxurious city of Corinth, in preference to the barbarous countries of the uncivilized world, that ſome of his earlieſt Epiſtles were addreſſed.

Natural religion muſt have ſhewn man that he was a ſinner, or we ſhould not have heard of ſuch frequent horrors of conſcience, ſuch inextinguiſhable remorſe as is diſcoverable in the expreſſions of many heathens. It even flattered him with an intimation that the wrath of the Deity might be averted; this accounts for their numerous altars, ſacrifices, and luſtrations. But theſe were only vague hopes, indefinite notions floating on a ſea of doubt and uncertainty. They had no foundation in the divine promiſe; the penitent ſinner had no aſſurance of the divine forgiveneſs. The doctrine of

ſalvation

ſalvation by the croſs of Chriſt is ſo contrary to all human conception, that it never could have come from man; being ſo incredible to natural reaſon, "that man," ſays a fine writer, "ſtands in need of all his ſubmiſſion to make it an object of his faith, though an infallible God has revealed it."

But even natural religion was little underſtood by thoſe who profeſſed it; it was full of obſcurity till viewed by the clear light of the Goſpel. Not only natural religion remained to be clearly comprehended, but reaſon itſelf remained to be carried to its higheſt pitch in the countries where revelation is profeſſed. Natural religion could not ſee itſelf by its own light; reaſon could not extricate itſelf from the labyrinth of error and ignorance in which falſe religion had involved the world. Grace has raiſed nature. Revelation has given a lift to reaſon, and taught her to deſpiſe the follies and corruptions which obſcured her brightneſs. If Nature is now delivered from darkneſs, it was

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the helping hand of Revelation which raiſed her from the rubbiſh in which ſhe lay buried.

Chriſtianity has not only given us right conceptions of God, of his holineſs, of the way in which he will be worſhipped: it has not only given us principles to promote our happineſs here, and to inſure it hereafter; but it has really taught us what a proud philoſophy arrogates to itſelf, the right uſe of reaſon. It has given us thoſe principles of examining and judging, by which we are enabled to determine on the abſurdity of falſe religions. "For to what elſe can it be aſcribed," ſays the ſagacious Biſhop Sherlock, "that in every Nation that names the name of Chriſt, even Reaſon and Nature ſee and condemn the follies, to which others are ſtill, for want of the ſame help, held in ſubjection?"

Allowing, however, that Plato and Antoninus ſeemed to have been taught of Heaven, yet the object for which we contend is, that no proviſion was made for the vulgar. While a faint ray ſhone on the page of Philoſophy,

loſophy, the people were involved in darkneſs which might be felt. The million were left to live without knowledge, and to die without hope. For what knowledge or what hope would be acquired from the prepoſterous, though amuſing, and, in many reſpects, elegant Mythology, which they might pick up in their Poets, the belief of which ſeemed to be confined to the populace?

But there was no common principle of hope or fear, of faith or practice, no motive of conſolation, no bond of charity, no communion of everlaſting intereſts, no reverſionary equality between the wife and the ignorant, the maſter and the ſlave, the Greek and the Barbarian.

A religion was wanted which ſhould be of general application. Chriſtianity happily accommodated itſelf to the common exigence. It furniſhed an adequate ſupply to the univerſal want. Inſtead of perpetual but unexpiating ſacrifices to appeaſe imaginary deities,

Gods ſuch as guilt makes welcome,

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it preſents "one oblation, once offered, a full, perfect, and ſufficient ſacrifice, oblation and ſatisfaction for the ſins of the whole world." It preſents one conſiſtent ſcheme of morals growing out of one uniform ſyſtem of doctrines; one perfect rule of practice depending on one principle of faith: it offers grace to direct the one and to aſſiſt the other. It encircles the whole ſphere of duty with the broad and golden zone of coaleſcing charity, ſtamped with the beautiful inſcription, "a new Commandment give I unto you, that you love one another." Chriſtianity, inſtead of deſtroying the diſtinctions of rank, or breaking in on the regulations of ſociety, by this univerſal precept, furniſhes new fences to its order, additional ſecurity to its repoſe, and freſh ſtrength to its ſubordinations.

The precept of doing to others as we would they ſhould do unto us, is ſo clear and undeniable a duty, that the light of nature had impreſſed it upon many on whom the light of Revelation had never ſhone. A Roman

Roman Emperor cauſed it to be engraved on his plate. The firſt Incas of Peru taught it as one of their moſt indiſpenſable rules; but it received its higheſt ſanction and fulleſt confirmation from thoſe Divine lips who ſtamped its importance in the Chriſtian code by the broad declaration, *this is the law and the prophets:* thus eſtabliſhing a legitimate and regulated ſelf-love as the ſtandard of our ſocial conduct; as both the rule of charity, and the law of equity. How lamentably do men depart from this obvious and intelligible principle when they vindicate their unkindneſs or their injuſtice by making what others *actually* do to them, their own meaſure of retribution, inſtead of what they *would* that others ſhould do!

Were this univerſal requiſition uniformly obſerved, the whole frame of ſociety would be cemented and conſolidated into one indiſſoluble bond of univerſal brotherhood. This divinely enacted law is the fundamental principle of juſtice, charity, patience, forbearance, in ſhort, of all ſocial virtue. That

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it does not produce theſe excellent effects, is not owing to any defect in the principle, but in our corrupt nature, which ſo reluctantly, ſo imperfectly obeys it. If it were conſcientiouſly adopted, and ſubſtantially acted upon, received in its very ſpirit, and obeyed from the ground of the heart, human laws might be abrogated, Courts of Juſtice aboliſhed, and Treatiſes of Morality burnt; war would be no longer an Art, nor military Tactics a Science. We ſhould ſuffer long and be kind, and ſo far from "ſeeking that which is another's," we ſhould not even "ſeek our own."

But let not the Soldier or the Lawyer be alarmed. Their craft is in no danger. The world does not intend to act upon the Divine principle which would injure their profeſſions; and till this only revolution which good men deſire, actually takes place, our fortunes will not be ſecure without the exertions of the one, nor our lives without the protection of the other.

All

All the virtues have their appropriate place and rank in Scripture. They are introduced as individually beautiful, and as reciprocally connected, like the graces in the Mythologic dance. But perhaps no Christian grace ever sat to the hand of a more consummate master than Charity. Her incomparable painter, Saint Paul, has drawn her at full length, in all her fair proportions. Every attitude is full of grace, every lineament, of beauty. The whole delineation is perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

Who can look at this finished piece without blushing at his own want of likeness to it? Yet if this conscious dissimilitude induce a cordial desire of resemblance, the humiliation will be salutary. Perhaps a more frequent contemplation of this exquisite figure, accompanied with earnest endeavours for a growing resemblance, would gradually lead us, not barely to admire the Portrait, but would at length assimilate us to the Divine Original.

CHAP. X.

Chriſtian Holineſs.

CHRISTIANITY then, as we have attempted to ſhew in the preceding Chapter, exhibits no different ſtandards of goodneſs applicable to different ſtations or characters. No one can be allowed to reſt in a low degree and plead his exemption for aiming no higher. No one can be ſecure in any ſtate of piety below that ſtate which would not have been enjoined on all, had not all been entitled to the means of attaining it.

Thoſe who keep their pattern in their eye, though they may fail of the higheſt attainments, will not be ſatisfied with ſuch as are low. The ſtriking inferiority will excite compunction; compunction will ſtimulate them to preſs on, which thoſe never do, who, loſing ſight of their ſtandard, are ſatisfied with the height they have reached.

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He is not likely to be the object of God's favour, who takes his determined ſtand on the very loweſt ſtep in the ſcale of perfection; who does not even aſpire above it, whoſe aim ſeems to be, not ſo much to pleaſe God as to eſcape puniſhment. Many however will doubtleſs be accepted though their progreſs has been ſmall; their difficulties may have been great, their natural capacity weak, their temptations ſtrong, and their inſtruction defective.

Revelation has not only furniſhed injunctions but motives to holineſs; not only motives, but examples and authorities. "Be ye therefore perfect" (according to your meaſure and degree) "as your father which is in heaven is perfect." And, what ſays the Old Teſtament? It accords with the New—"Be ye holy, for I the Lord your God am holy."

This was the injunction of God himſelf, not given excluſively to Moſes, to the leader and legiſlator, or to a few diſtinguiſhed officers, or to a ſelection of eminent men, but

to an immenſe body of people, even to the whole aſſembled hoſt of Iſrael: to men of all ranks, profeſſions, capacities, and characters, to the Miniſter of religion, and to the uninſtructed, to enlightened rulers, and to feeble women. "God," ſays an excellent writer *, "had antecedently given to his people particular laws ſuited to their ſeveral exigencies, and various conditions, but the command to be holy was a general (might he not have ſaid a univerſal) law."

"Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the Gods? Who is like unto thee, glorious in holineſs, fearful in praiſes, doing wonders?" This is perhaps the ſublimeſt apoſtrophe of praiſe, rendered more ſtriking by its interrogatory form, which the Scriptures have recorded. It makes a part of the firſt ſong of gratulation which is to be found in the treaſury of ſacred Poetry. This epithet of *holy* is more frequently affixed to the name of God than any other. His *mighty* name

* Saurin.

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is leſs often invoked, than his *holy* name. To offend againſt this attribute is repreſented as more heinous than to oppoſe any other. It has been remarked that the impiety of the Aſſyrian Monarch is not deſcribed by his hoſtility againſt the great, the Almighty God, but it is made an aggravation of his crime that he had committed it againſt *the Holy one of Iſrael.*

When God condeſcended to give a pledge for the performance of his promiſe, he ſwears by his *holineſs*, as if it were the diſtinguiſhing quality which was more eſpecially binding. It ſeems connected and interwoven with all the divine perfections. Which of his excellences can we contemplate as ſeparated from this? Is not his juſtice ſtamped with ſanctity? It is free from any tincture of vindictiveneſs, and is therefore a holy juſtice. His mercy has none of the partiality, or favouritiſm, or capricious fondneſs of human kindneſs, but is a holy mercy. His holineſs is not more the ſource of his mercies than of his puniſhments. If his

holineſs in his ſeverities to us wanted a juſtification, there cannot be at once a more ſubſtantial and more ſplendid illuſtration of it than the noble paſſage already quoted, for he is called "glorious in holineſs" immediately after he had vindicated the honour of his name, by the miraculous deſtruction of the army of Pharaoh.

Is it not then a neceſſary conſequence growing out of his own perfections, that "a righteous God loveth righteouſneſs," that he will of courſe require in his creatures a deſire to imitate as well as to adore that attribute by which He himſelf loves to be diſtinguiſhed? We cannot indeed, like God, be eſſentially holy. In an infinite being it is a ſubſtance, in a created being it is only an accident. God is the eſſence of holineſs, but we can have no holineſs, nor any other good thing, but what we derive from him.—It is his prerogative, but our privilege.

If God loves holineſs becauſe it is his image, he muſt conſequently hate ſin becauſe it defaces his image. If he glorifies his

his own mercy and goodneſs in rewarding virtue, he no leſs vindicates the honour of his holineſs in the puniſhment of vice.—A perfect God can no more approve of ſin in his creatures than he can commit it himſelf. He may forgive ſin on his own conditions, but there are no conditions on which he can be reconciled to it. The infinite goodneſs of God may delight in the beneficial purpoſes to which his infinite wiſdom has made the ſins of his creatures ſubſervient, but ſin itſelf will always be abhorrent to his nature. His wiſdom may turn it to a merciful end, but his indignation at the offence cannot be diminiſhed. He loves man, for he cannot but love his own work; He hates ſin, for that was man's own invention, and no part of the work which God had made. Even in the imperfect adminiſtration of human laws, impunity of crimes would be conſtrued into approbation of them*.

* *Note*—See Charnok on the Attributes.

The law of holineſs, then, is a law binding on all perſons without diſtinction, not limited to the period nor to the people to whom it was given. It reaches through the whole Jewiſh diſpenſation, and extends, with wider demands and higher ſanctions, to every Chriſtian, of every denomination, of every age, and every country.

A more ſublime motive cannot be aſſigned why we ſhould be holy than becauſe "the Lord our God is holy." Men of the world have no objection to the terms virtue, morality, integrity, rectitude, but they aſſociate ſomething overacted, not to ſay hypocritical, with the term holineſs, and neither uſe it in a good ſenſe when applied to others, nor would wiſh to have it applied to themſelves, but make it over, with a little ſuſpicion, and not a little deriſion, to puritans and enthuſiaſts.

This ſuſpected epithet however is ſurely reſcued from every injurious aſſociation, if we conſider it as the choſen attribute of the Moſt High. We do not preſume to apply the

the terms virtue, probity, morality, to God, but we aſcribe holineſs to him becauſe he firſt aſcribed it to himſelf, as the aggregate and conſummation of all his perfections.

Shall ſo imperfect a being as Man, then, ridicule the application of this term to others, or be aſhamed of it himſelf? There is a cauſe indeed which ſhould make him aſhamed of the appropriation, that of not deſerving it. This comprehenſive appellation includes all the Chriſtian graces, all the virtues in their juſt proportion, order, and harmony; in all their bearings, relations, and dependencies. And as in God, glory and holineſs are united, ſo the Apoſtle combines "ſanctification and honour" as the glory of Man.

Traces more or leſs of the holineſs of God may be found in his works, to thoſe who view them with the eye of faith: they are more plainly viſible in his Providences; but it is in his word that we muſt chiefly look for the manifeſtations of his holineſs. He is every where deſcribed as perfectly holy in himſelf, as a model to be imitated by his

creatures, and though with an interval immeaſurable, as imitable by them.

The great doctrine of Redemption is inſeparably connected with the doctrine of Sanctification. As an admirable writer has obſerved, "if the blood of Chriſt reconcile us to the juſtice of God, the ſpirit of Chriſt is to reconcile us to the holineſs of God." When we are told therefore that Chriſt is made unto us "righteouſneſs," we are in the ſame place taught that he is made unto us "ſanctification;" that is, he is both juſtifier and ſanctifier. In vain ſhall we deceive ourſelves by reſting on his ſacrifice, while we neglect to imitate his example.

The glorious Spirits which ſurround the throne of God are not repreſented as ſinging hallelujahs to his omnipotence, nor even to his mercy, but to that attribute which as with a glory encircles all the reſt. They perpetually cry, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hoſts; and it is obſervable, that the Angels which adore him for his holineſs are the miniſters of his juſtice. Thoſe

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pure intelligences perceive, no doubt, that this union of attributes conſtitutes the divine perfection.

This infinitely bleſſed being, then, to whom angels and archangels and all the hoſts of heaven are continually aſcribing holineſs, has commanded us to be holy. To be holy becauſe God is holy, is both an argument and a command. An argument founded on the perfections of God, and a command to imitate him. This command is given to creatures fallen indeed, but to whom God graciouſly promiſes ſtrength for the imitation. If we do not endeavour to imitate him whom we worſhip, we do not worſhip him in ſincerity. It is obvious that we ſee little of the infinite excellences of that being to ſome faint reſemblance of which we do not endeavour to aſpire. If in God holineſs implies an aggregate of perfections; in man, even in his low degree, it is an incorporation of the Chriſtian graces.

The holineſs of God indeed is confined by no limitation; ours is bounded, finite,

imperfect. Yet let us be ſedulous to extend our little ſphere. Let our deſires be large, though our capacities are contracted. Let our aims be lofty, though our attainments are low. Let us be ſolicitous that no day paſs without ſome augmentation of our holineſs, ſome added height in our aſpirations, ſome wider expanſion in the compaſs of our virtues. Let us ſtrive every day for ſome ſuperiority to the preceding day, ſomething that ſhall diſtinctly mark the paſſing ſcene with progreſs; ſomething that ſhall inſpire an humble hope that we are rather leſs unfit for heaven to-day, than we were yeſterday. The celebrated artiſt who has recorded that he paſſed no day without drawing a line, drew it not for repetition but for progreſs; not to produce a given number of ſtrokes, but to forward his work, to complete his deſign. The Chriſtian, like the painter, does not draw his lines at random, he has a model to imitate, as well as an outline to fill. Every touch conforms him more and more to the great original. He who has tranſ-

fuſed moſt of the life of God into his ſoul, has copied it moſt ſucceſsfully.

"To *ſeek* happineſs," ſays one of the Fathers, "is to deſire God, and to find him *is* that happineſs." Our very happineſs therefore is not our independent property: it flows from that eternal mind which is the ſource and ſum of happineſs. In vain we look for felicity in all around us. It can only be found in that original fountain, whence we, and all we are and have, are derived. Where then is the imaginary wiſe man of the ſchool of Zeno? What is the perfection of virtue ſuppoſed by Ariſtotle? They have no exiſtence but in the Romance of Philoſophy. Happineſs muſt be imperfect in an imperfect ſtate. Religion, it is true, is initial happineſs, and points to its perfection: but as the beſt men poſſeſs it but imperfectly, they cannot be perfectly happy. Nothing can confer completeneſs which is itſelf incomplete. "With Thee, O Lord, is the fountain of life, and in Thy light only we ſhall ſee light *."

* See Leighton on Happineſs.

Whatever ſhall ſtill remain wanting in our attainments, and much will ſtill remain, let this laſt, greateſt, higheſt conſideration ſtimulate our languid exertions, that God has negatively promiſed the beatific viſion, the enjoyment of his preſence, to this attainment, by ſpecifically proclaiming that without holineſs no man ſhall ſee his face. To know God is the rudiments of that eternal life which will hereafter be perfected by ſeeing him:—As there is no ſtronger reaſon why we muſt not look for perfect happineſs in this life than becauſe there is no perfect holineſs, ſo the nearer advances we make to the one, the greater progreſs we ſhall make towards the other; we muſt cultivate here thoſe tendencies and tempers which muſt be carried to perfection in a happier clime. But as holineſs is the concomitant of happineſs, ſo muſt it be its precurſor. As ſin has deſtroyed our happineſs, ſo ſin muſt be deſtroyed before our happineſs can be reſtored. Our nature muſt be renovated before our felicity can be eſtabliſhed. This is according

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to the nature of things as well as agreeable to the law and will of God. Let us then carefully look to the ſubduing in our inmoſt hearts all thoſe diſpoſitions that are unlike God, all thoſe actions, thoughts and tendencies that are contrary to God.

Independently therefore of all the other motives to holineſs which religion ſuggeſts; independently of the fear of puniſhment, independently even of the hope of glory, let us be holy from this ennobling, elevating motive, becauſe the Lord our God is holy. And when our virtue flags, let it be renovated by this imperative injunction, backed by this irreſiſtible argument. The motive for imitation, and the Being to be imitated, ſeem almoſt to identify us with infinity. It is a connection which endears, an aſſimilation which dignifies, a reſemblance which elevates. The Apoſtle has added to the prophet an aſſurance which makes the fulneſs and conſummation of the promiſe, "that though we know not yet what we ſhall be, yet we know that when he ſhall appear, we

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ſhall be like him, for we ſhall ſee him as he is."

In what a beautiful variety of glowing expreſſions, and admiring ſtrains, do the Scripture worthies delight to repreſent God; not only in relation to what he is to them, but to the ſupreme excellence of his own tranſcendent perfections! They expatiate, they amplify, they dwell with unwearied iteration on the adorable theme; they ranſack language, they exhauſt all the expreſſions of praiſe and wonder and admiration, all the images of aſtoniſhment; they delight to laud and magnify his glorious name. They praiſe him, they bleſs him, they worſhip him, they glorify him, they give thanks to him for his great glory, ſaying, "Holy holy, holy, Lord God of Hoſts, Heaven and earth are full of the majeſty of thy glory."

They glorify him relatively to themſelves. — "I will magnify Thee, O Lord my ſtrength — My help cometh of God — The Lord himſelf is the portion of my inheritance."

ance." At another time, ſoaring with a noble diſintereſtedneſs, and quite loſing ſight of ſelf and all created glories, they adore him for his own incommunicable excellences. "Be thou exalted, O God, in thine own ſtrength."—"Oh the depth of the riches both of the wiſdom and knowledge of God!" Then burſting into a rapture of adoration, and burning with a more intenſe flame, they cluſter his attributes—"To the King eternal, immortal, inviſible, be honour and glory for ever and ever." *One* is loſt in admiration of his wiſdom—his aſcription is "to the only *wiſe* God." *Another* in triumphant ſtrains overflows with tranſport at the conſideration of the attribute on which we have been deſcanting—"O Lord, who is like unto Thee, there is none holy as the Lord." "Sing praiſes unto the Lord, oh ye ſaints of his, and give thanks unto him for a remembrance of his holineſs."

The Prophets and Apoſtles were not deterred from pouring out the overflowings of their fervent ſpirits, they were not reſtrained from

from celebrating the perfections of their Creator, through the cold-hearted fear of being reckoned Enthuſiaſts. The ſaints of old were not prevented from breathing out their rapturous hoſannas to the King of ſaints, through the coward dread of being branded as fanatical. The conceptions of their minds dilating with the view of the glorious conſtellation of the divine attributes; and the affections of their hearts warming with the thoughts that thoſe attributes were all concentrated in Mercy,—they diſplay a ſublime oblivion of themſelves,—they forget every thing but God. Their own wants dwindle to a point. Their own concerns, nay the Univerſe itſelf, ſhrink into nothing. They ſeem abſorbed in the effulgence of deity, loſt in the radiant beams of infinite glory.

CHAP XI.

On the comparatively ſmall Faults and Virtues.

THE "Fiſhers of Men," as if excluſively bent on catching the greater ſinners, often make the interſtices of the moral net ſo wide, that it cannot retain thoſe of more ordinary ſize, which everywhere abound. Their draught might be more abundant, were not the meſhes ſo large that the ſmaller ſort, aided by their own lubricity, eſcape the toils and ſlip through. Happy to find themſelves not bulky enough to be entangled, they plunge back again into their native element, enjoy their eſcape, and hope they may ſafely wait to grow bigger before they are in danger of being caught.

It is of more importance than we are aware, or are willing to allow, that we take care diligently to practiſe the ſmaller virtues, avoid ſcrupulouſly the leſſer ſins, and bear patiently inferior trials; for the ſin of habi-

tually

tually yielding, or the grace of habitually reſiſting, in comparatively ſmall points, tends in no inconſiderable degree to produce that vigour or that debility of mind, on which hangs victory or defeat.

Conſcience is moral ſenſation. It is the haſty perception of good and evil, the peremptory deciſion of the mind to adopt the one or avoid the other. Providence has furniſhed the body with ſenſes, and the ſoul with conſcience, as a *tact* by which to ſhrink from the approach of danger; as a prompt feeling to ſupply the deductions of reaſoning; as a ſpontaneous impulſe to precede a train of reflections for which the ſuddenneſs and ſurpriſe of the attack allow no time. An enlightened conſcience, if kept tenderly alive by a continual attention to its admonitions, would eſpecially preſerve us from thoſe ſmaller ſins, and ſtimulate us to thoſe leſſer duties which we are falſely apt to think are too inſignificant to be brought to the bar of religion, too trivial to be weighed by the ſtandard of Scripture.

By

By cheriſhing this quick feeling of rectitude, light and ſudden as the flaſh from heaven, and which is in fact the motion of the ſpirit, we intuitively reject what is wrong before we have time to examine why it is wrong; and ſeize on what is right before we have time to examine why it is right. Should we not then be careful how we extinguiſh this ſacred ſpark? Will any thing be more likely to extinguiſh it than to neglect its hourly mementos to perform the ſmaller duties, and to avoid the leſſer faults which, as they in a good meaſure make up the ſum of human life, will naturally fix and determine our character, that creature of habits? Will not our neglect or obſervance of it, incline or indiſpoſe us for thoſe more important duties of which theſe ſmaller ones are connecting links.

The vices derive their exiſtence from wildneſs, confuſion, diſorganization. The diſcord of the paſſions is owing to their having different views, conflicting aims, and oppoſite ends. The rebellious vices have no

common

common head; each is all to itſelf. They promote their own operations by diſturbing thoſe of others, but in diſturbing they do not deſtroy them. Though they are all of one family they live on no friendly terms. Profligacy hates covetouſneſs as much as if it were a virtue. The life of every ſin is a life of conflict which occaſions the torment, but not the death of its oppoſite. Like the fabled brood of the ſerpent, the paſſions ſpring up, armed againſt each other, but they fail to complete the reſemblance, for they do not effect their mutual deſtruction.

But without union the Chriſtian graces could not be perfected, and the ſmaller virtues are the threads and filaments which gently but firmly tie them together. There is an attractive power in goodneſs which draws each part to the other. This concord of the virtues is derived from their having one common centre in which all meet. In vice there is a ſtrong repulſion. Though bad men ſeek each other, they do not love each other. Each ſeeks the other in order

to

to promote his own purpoſes, while he hates him by whom his purpoſes are promoted.

The leſſer qualities of the human character are like the lower people in a country; they are numerically, if not individually, important. If well regulated they become valuable from that very circumſtance of numbers which, under a negligent adminiſtration, renders them formidable. The peace of the individual mind and of the nation, is materially affected by the diſcipline in which theſe inferior orders are maintained. Laxity and neglect in both caſes are ſubverſive of all good government.

But if we may be allowed "to glance from earth to heaven," perhaps the beauty of the leſſer virtues may be ſtill better illuſtrated by that long and luminous track made up of minute almoſt imperceptible ſtars, which though ſeparately too inconſiderable to attract attention, yet from their number and their confluence, form that ſoft and ſhining ſtream of light every where diſcernible, and which always correſponds to the

the ſame fixed ſtars, as the ſmaller virtues do to their concomitant great ones.—Without purſuing the metaphor to the claſſic fiction that the Galaxy was the road through which the ancient heroes went to heaven, may we not venture to ſay that Chriſtians will make their way thither more pleaſant by the conſiſtent practice of the minuter virtues?

Every Chriſtian ſhould conſider Religion as a fort which he is called to defend. The meaneſt ſoldier in the army, if he add patriotiſm to valour, will fight as earneſtly as if the glory of the conteſt depended on his ſingle arm. But he brings his watchfulneſs as well as his courage into action. He ſtrenuouſly defends every paſs he is appointed to guard, without enquiring whether it be great or ſmall. There is not any defect in religion or morals ſo little as to be of no conſequence. Worldly things may be little becauſe their aim and end may be little. Things are great or ſmall, not according to their oſtenſible importance, but according to the magnitude of their object, and the importance of their conſequences.

The

The acquiſition of even the ſmalleſt virtue being, as has been before obſerved, an actual conqueſt over the oppoſite vice, doubles our moral ſtrength. The ſpiritual enemy has one ſubject leſs, and the conqueror one virtue more.

By allowed negligence in ſmall things, we are not aware how much we injure religion in the eye of the world. How can we expect people to believe that we are in earneſt in great points, when they ſee that we cannot withſtand a trivial temptation, againſt which reſiſtance would have been comparatively eaſy? At a diſtance they hear with reſpect of our general characters. They become domeſticated with us, and diſcover the ſame failings, littleneſſes and bad tempers, as they have been accuſtomed to meet with in the moſt ordinary perſons.

If Milton in one of his letters to a learned foreigner who had viſited him, could congratulate himſelf on the conſciouſneſs that in that viſit he had been found equal to his reputation, and had ſupported in private converſation

converſation his high character as an author; ſhall not the Chriſtian be equally anxious to ſupport the credit of his holy profeſſion, by not betraying in familiar life any temper inconſiſtent with religion?

It is not difficult to attract reſpect on great occaſions, where we are kept in order by knowing that the public eye is fixed upon us. It is eaſy to maintain a regard to our dignity in a "Sympoſiac, or an academical dinner;" but to labour to maintain it in the receſſes of domeſtic privacy requires more watchfulneſs, and is no leſs the duty, than it will be the habitual practice, of the conſiſtent Chriſtian.

Our neglect of inferior duties is particularly injurious to the minds of our dependants and ſervants. If they ſee us "weak and infirm of purpoſe," peeviſh, irreſolute, capricious, paſſionate, or inconſiſtent, in our daily conduct, which comes under their immediate obſervation, and which comes alſo within their power of judging, they will not give us credit for thoſe higher qualities which

which we may poſſeſs, and thoſe ſuperior duties which we may be more careful to fulfil. Neither their capacity nor their opportunities, may enable them to judge of the orthodoxy of the head; but there will be obvious and deciſive proofs to the meaneſt capacity, of the ſtate and temper of the heart. Our greater qualities will do them little good, while our leſſer but inceſſant faults do them much injury. Seeing us ſo defective in the daily courſe of domeſtic conduct, though they will obey us becauſe they are obliged to it, they will neither love nor eſteem us enough to be influenced by our advice, nor to be governed by our inſtructions, on thoſe great points which every conſcientious head of a family will be careful to inculcate on all about him. It demands no leſs circumſpection to be a *Chriſtian*, than to be "a *hero*, to one's valet de chambre."

In all that relates to God and to himſelf, the Chriſtian knows of no ſmall faults. He conſiders all allowed and wilful ſins, whatever be their magnitude, as an offence

againſt his Maker. Nothing that offends *him* can be inſignificant. Nothing that contributes to faſten on ourſelves a wrong habit can be trifling. Faults which we are accuſtomed to conſider as ſmall, are repeated without compunction. The habit of committing them is confirmed by the repetition. Frequency renders us at firſt indifferent, then inſenſible. The hopeleſſneſs attending a long indulged cuſtom generates careleſſneſs, till for want of exerciſe the power of reſiſtance is firſt weakened, then deſtroyed.

But there is a ſtill more ſerious point of view in which the ſubject may be conſidered. Do ſmall faults continually repeated, always retain their original diminutiveneſs? Is any axiom more eſtabliſhed than that all evil is of a progreſſive nature? Is a bad temper which is never repreſſed, no worſe after years of indulgence, than when we firſt gave the reins to it? Does that which we firſt allowed ourſelves under the name of harmleſs levity on ſerious ſubjects, never proceed to profaneneſs? Does what was once admired as

proper

proper ſpirit, never grow into pride, never ſwell into inſolence? Does the habit of incorrect narrative, or looſe talking, or allowed hyperbole, never lead to falſehood, never ſettle in deceit? Before we poſitively determine that ſmall faults are innocent, we muſt undertake to prove that they ſhall never outgrow their primitive dimenſions; we muſt aſcertain that the infant ſhall never become a giant.

Procraſtination is reckoned among the moſt venial of our faults, and ſits ſo lightly on our minds, that we ſcarcely apologize for it. But who can aſſure us that had not the aſſiſtance we had reſolved to give to one friend under diſtreſs, or the advice to another under temptation to-day, being delayed, and from mere ſloth and indolence been put off till to-morrow, it might not have preſerved the fortunes of the one, or ſaved the ſoul of the other?

It is not enough that we perform duties, we muſt perform them at the right time. We muſt do the duty of every day in its own

ſeaſon. Every day has its own imperious duties; we muſt not depend upon to-day for fulfilling thoſe which we neglected yeſterday, for to-day might not have been granted us. To-morrow will be equally peremptory in its demands; and the ſucceeding day, if we live to ſee it, will be ready with its proper claims.

Indeciſion, though it is not ſo often cauſed by reflection as by the want of it, yet may be as miſchievous, for if we ſpend too much time in balancing probabilities, the period for action is loſt. While we are ruminating on difficulties which may never occur, reconciling differences which perhaps do not exiſt, and poiſing in oppoſite ſcales things of nearly the ſame weight, the opportunity is loſt of producing that good, which a firm and manly deciſion would have effected.

Idleneſs, though itſelf "the moſt unperforming of all the vices," is however the paſs through which they all enter, the ſtage on which they all act. Though ſupremely paſſive itſelf, it lends a willing hand to all

evil,

evil, practical as well as ſpeculative. It is the abettor of every ſin whoever commits it, the receiver of all booty whoever is the thief. If it does nothing itſelf, it connives at all the miſchief that is done by others.

Vanity is exceedingly miſplaced when ranked, as ſhe commonly is, in the catalogue of ſmall faults. It is under her character of harmleſſneſs that ſhe does all her miſchief. She is indeed often found in the ſociety of great virtues. She does not follow in the train, but mixes herſelf with the company, and by mixing mars it. The uſe our ſpiritual enemy makes of her is a maſter ſtroke. When he cannot prevent us from doing right actions, he can accompliſh his purpoſe almoſt as well "by making us vain of them." When he cannot deprive the public of our benevolence, he can defeat the effect to ourſelves by poiſoning the principle. When he cannot rob others of the good effect of the deed, he can gain his point by robbing the doer of his reward.

Peeviſhneſs is another of the minor miſeries. Human life, though ſufficiently unhappy, cannot contrive to furniſh misfortunes ſo often as the paſſionate and the peeviſh can ſupply impatience. To commit our reaſon and temper to the mercy of every acquaintance, and of every ſervant, is not making the wiſeſt uſe of them. If we recollect that violence and peeviſhneſs are the common reſource of thoſe whoſe knowledge is ſmall, and whoſe arguments are weak, our very pride might lead us to ſubdue our paſſion, if we had not a better principle to reſort to. Anger is the common refuge of inſignificance. People who feel their character to be ſlight, hope to give it weight by inflation. But the blown bladder at its fulleſt diſtenſion is ſtill empty. Sluggiſh characters, above all, have no right to be paſſionate. They ſhould be contented with their own congenial faults. Dulneſs however has its impetuoſities and its fluctuations as well as genius. It is on the coaſt of heavy Bœotia that the Euripus

exhibits

exhibits its unparalleled reſtleſſneſs and agitation.

Trifling is ranked among the venial faults. But if time be one grand talent given us in order to our ſecuring eternal life; if we triſle away that time ſo as to loſe that eternal life, on which by not triſling we might have laid hold, then will it anſwer the end of ſin. A life devoted to triſles not only takes away the inclination, but the capacity for higher purſuits. The truths of Chriſtianity have ſcarcely more influence on a frivolous than on a profligate character. If the mind be ſo abſorbed, not merely with what is vicious, but with what is uſeleſs, as to be thoroughly diſinclined to the activities of a life of piety, it matters little what the cauſe is which ſo diſinclines it. If theſe habits cannot be accuſed of great moral evil, yet it argues a low ſtate of mind, that a being who has an eternity at ſtake can abandon itſelf to trivial purſuits. If the great concern of life cannot be ſecured without habitual watchfulneſs, how is it to be ſecured by habitual careleſſneſs? It

will afford little comfort to the trifler, when at the laſt reckoning he gives in his long negative catalogue that the more oſtenſible offender was worſe employed. The trifler will not be weighed in the ſcale with the profligate, but in the balance of the ſanctuary.

Some men make for themſelves a ſort of code of the leſſer morals, of which they ſettle both the laws and the chronology. They fix "the climactericks of the mind *;" determine at what period ſuch a vice may be adopted without diſcredit, at what age one bad habit may give way to another more in character. Having ſettled it as a matter of courſe, that to a certain age certain faults are natural, they proceed to act as if they thought them neceſſary.

But let us not practice on ourſelves the groſs impoſition to believe that any failing, much leſs any vice, is neceſſarily appended to any ſtate or any age, or that it is irrefutible as any. We may accuſtom our-

* Dr Johnſon.

ſelves

ſelves to talk of vanity and extravagance as belonging to the young, and avarice and peeviſhneſs to the old, till the next ſtep will be that we ſhall think ourſelves juſtified in adopting them. Whoever is eager to find excuſes for vice and folly, will feel his own backwardneſs to practiſe them much diminiſhed. It is only to make out an imaginary neceſſity, and then we eaſily fall into the neceſſity we have imagined. Providence has eſtabliſhed no ſuch aſſociation. There is, it is true, more danger of certain faults under certain circumſtances; and ſome temptations are ſtronger at ſome periods, but it is a proof that they are not irreſiſtible becauſe *all* do not fall into them. The evil is in ourſelves, who mitigate the diſcredit by the ſuppoſed neceſſity. The prediction, like the dream of the Aſtrologer, creates the event inſtead of foretelling it. But there is no ſuppoſition can be made of a bad caſe which will juſtify the making it our own: Nor will general poſitions ever ſerve for individual apologies.—Who has not known

perſons who, though they retain the ſound health and vigour of active life, ſink prematurely into ſloth and inactivity, ſolely on the ground that theſe diſpoſitions are fancied to be unavoidably incident to advancing years? They demand the indulgence before they feel the infirmity. Indolence thus forges a diſmiſſion from duty before the diſcharge is iſſued out by Providence. No.—Let us endeavour to meet the evils of the ſeveral conditions and periods of life with ſubmiſſion, but it is an offence to their Divine diſpenſer to foreſtal them.

But we have ſtill a ſaving clauſe for ourſelves, whether the evil be of a greater or leſſer magnitude. If the fault be great we lament the inability to reſiſt it, if ſmall, we deny the importance of ſo doing; we plead that we cannot withſtand a great temptation, and that a ſmall one is not worth withſtanding. But if the temptation or the fault be great, we ſhould reſiſt it on account of that very magnitude; if ſmall, the giving it up can coſt but little; and the conſcientious habit

of

of conquering the leſs will confer conſiderable ſtrength towards ſubduing the greater.

There is again a ſort of ſplendid character, which winding itſelf up occaſionally to certain ſhining actions, thinks itſelf fully juſtified in breaking looſe from the ſhackles of reſtraint in ſmaller things; it makes no ſcruple to indemnify itſelf for theſe popular deeds by indulgences which, though allowed, are far from innocent. It thus ſecures to itſelf praiſe and popularity by what is ſure to gain it, and immunity from cenſure in indulging the favourite fault, practically exclaiming, "is it not a little one?"

Vanity is at the bottom of almoſt all, may we not ſay, of all our ſins? We think more of ſignalizing than of ſaving ourſelves. We overlook the hourly occaſions which occur of ſerving, of obliging, of comforting thoſe around us, while we ſometimes not unwillingly perform an act of notorious generoſity. The habit however in the former caſe better indicates the diſpoſition and bent of the

mind, than the ſolitary act of ſplendor. The Apoſtle does not ſay whatſoever *great* things ye do, but "whatſoever things ye do, do *all* to the glory of God." Actions are leſs weighed by their bulk than their motive. Virtues are leſs meaſured by their ſplendor than their principle. The racer proceeds in his courſe more effectually by a ſteady unſlackened pace, than by ſtarts of violent but unequal exertion.

That great abſtract of moral law, of which we have elſewhere ſpoken *, that rule of the higheſt court of appeal, ſet up in his own boſom, to which every man can always reſort, "all things that ye would that men ſhould do unto you do ye alſo unto them."—This law if faithfully obeyed, operating as an infallible remedy for all the diſorders of ſelf-love, would, by throwing its partiality into the right ſcale, eſtabliſh the exerciſe of all the ſmaller virtues. Its ſtrict obſervance would not only put a ſtop to all

* Chap. IX

injuſtice

injuſtice but to all unkindneſs; not only to oppreſſive acts, but to unfeeling language. Even haughty looks and ſupercilious geſtures would be baniſhed from the face of ſociety, did we aſk ourſelves how we ſhould like to receive what we are not aſhamed to give. Till we thus morally tranſmute place, perſon, and circumſtance with thoſe of our brother, we ſhall never treat him with the tenderneſs this gracious law enjoins.

Small virtues and ſmall offences are only ſo by compariſon. To treat a fellow-creature with harſh language, is not indeed a crime like robbing him of his eſtate or deſtroying his reputation. They are however all the offspring of the ſame family. They are the ſame in quality though not in degree. All flow, though in ſtreams of different magnitude, from the ſame fountain; all are indications of a departure from that principle which is included in the law of love. The conſequences they involve are not leſs certain, though they are leſs important.

The

The reaſon why what are called religious people often differ ſo little from others in ſmall trials is, that inſtead of bringing religion to their aid in their leſſer vexations, they either leave the diſturbance to prey upon their minds, or apply to falſe reliefs for its removal. Thoſe who are rendered unhappy by frivolous troubles, ſeek comfort in frivolous enjoyments. But we ſhould apply the ſame remedy to ordinary trials as to great ones; for as ſmall diſquietudes ſpring from the ſame cauſe as great trials, namely, the uncertain and imperfect condition of human life, ſo they require the ſame remedy. Meeting common cares with a right ſpirit would impart a ſmoothneſs to the temper, a ſpirit of cheerfulneſs to the heart, which would mightily break the force of heavier trials.

You apply to the power of religion in great evils. Why does it not occur to you to apply to it in the leſs? Is it that you think the inſtrument greater than the occaſion demands?

demands? It is not too great if the leſſer one will not produce the effect; or if it produce it in the wrong way, for there is ſuch a thing as putting an evil out of ſight without curing it. You would apply to religion on the loſs of your child — apply to it on the loſs of your temper. Throw in this wholeſome tree to ſweeten the bitter waters. As no calamity is too great for the power of Chriſtianity to mitigate, ſo none is too ſmall to experience its beneficial reſults. Our behaviour under the ordinary accidents of life forms a characteriſtic diſtinction between different claſſes of Chriſtians. The leaſt advanced reſort to Religion on great occaſions, the deeper proficient reſorts to it on all. What makes it appear of ſo little comparative value is, that the medicine prepared by the great Phyſician is thrown by inſtead of being taken. The patient thinks not of it but in extreme caſes. A remedy however potent, not applied, can produce no effect. But he who has adopted one fixed principle for the government of his life,

life, will try to keep it in perpetual exerciſe. An acquaintance with the nature of human evils and of their remedy, would check that ſpirit of complaint which ſo much abounds, and which often makes ſo little difference between people profeſſing religion and thoſe who profeſs it not.

If the duties in queſtion are not great, they become important by the conſtant demand that is made for them. They have been called "the ſmall coin of human life," and on their perpetual and unobſtructed circulation depends much of the comfort as well as convenience of its tranſactions. They make up in frequency what they want in magnitude. How few of us are called to carry the doctrines of Chriſtianity into diſtant lands! but which of us is not called every day to adorn thoſe doctrines, by gentleneſs in our own carriage, by kindneſs and forbearance to all about us?

In performing the unoſtenſible duties there is no incentive from vanity. No love of fame inſpires that virtue of which fame will

will never hear. There can be but one motive, and that the pureſt, for the exerciſe of virtues, the report of which will never reach beyond the little circle whoſe happineſs they promote. They do not fill the world with our renown, but they fill our own family with comfort, and if they have the love of God for their principle, they will have his favour for their reward.

In this enumeration of faults, we include not ſins of infirmity, inadvertency, and ſurprize, to which even the moſt ſincere Chriſtians are but too liable. What are here adverted to are allowed, habitual, and unreſiſted faults: habitual becauſe unreſiſted, and allowed from the notion that they are too inconſiderable to call for reſiſtance. Faults into which we are betrayed through ſurprize and inadvertency, though that is no reaſon for committing them, may not be without their uſes; they renew the ſalutary conviction of our ſinful nature, make us little in our own eyes, increaſe our ſenſe of dependence, promote watchfulneſs,

neſs, deepen humility, and quicken repentance.

We muſt however be careful not to entangle the conſcience or embarraſs the ſpirit by groundleſs apprehenſions. We have a merciful father, not a hard maſter to deal with. We muſt not harraſs our minds with a ſuſpicious dread as if by a needleſs rigour the Almighty were laying ſnares to entrap us, nor be terrified with imaginary fears as if he were on the watch to puniſh every caſual error.—To be immutable and impeccable belongs not to humanity. He who made us beſt knows of what we are made. —Our compaſſionate High Prieſt will bear with much infirmity, will pardon much involuntary weakneſs.

But knowing, as every man muſt know who looks into his own heart, the difficulties he has from the intervention of his evil tempers, in ſerving God faithfully, and ſtill however earneſtly deſirous to ſerve him, is it not to be lamented that he is not more ſolicitous to remove his hindrances by trying

to

to avoid thoſe inferior ſins, and reſiſting thoſe leſſer temptations, and practiſing thoſe ſmaller virtues, the neglect of which obſtructs his way, and keeps him back in the performance of higher duties. Inſtead of little renunciations being grievous, and petty ſelf-denials a hardſhip, they in reality ſoften grievances, diminiſh hardſhip. They are the private drill which trains for public ſervice.

If, as we have repeatedly remarked, the principle is the teſt of the action, we are hourly furniſhed with occaſions of ſhewing our piety by the ſpirit in which the quiet unnoticed actions of life are performed. The ſacrifices may be too little to be obſerved except by him to whom they are offered. But ſmall ſolicitudes, and demonſtrations of attachment, ſcarcely perceptible to any eye but his for whom they are made, bear the true character of love to God, as they are the infallible marks of affection to our fellow-creatures.

By

By enjoining ſmall duties, the ſpirit of which is every where implied in the Goſpel, God, as it were, ſeems contriving to render the great ones eaſy to us. He makes the light yoke of Chriſt ſtill lighter, not by abridging duty, but by increaſing its facility through its familiarity. Theſe little habits at once indicate the ſentiment of the ſoul and improve it.

It is an awful conſideration, and one which every Chriſtian ſhould bring home to his own boſom, whether ſmall faults wilfully perſiſted in, may not in time not only dim the light of conſcience, but extinguiſh the ſpirit of grace: Whether the power of reſiſtance againſt great ſins may not be finally withdrawn as a juſt puniſhment for having neglected to exert it againſt ſmall ones.

Let us endeavour to maintain in our minds the awful impreſſion that perhaps among the firſt objects which may meet our eyes when we open them on the eternal world,

world, may be that tremendous book, in which, together with our great and actual ſins, may be recorded in no leſs prominent characters, the ample page of omiſſions, of neglected opportunities, and even of fruitleſs good intentions, of which indolence, indeciſion, thoughtleſſneſs, vanity, trifling and procraſtination, concurred to fruſtrate the execution.

CHAP. XII.

Self-Examination.

IN this age of general enquiry, every kind of ignorance is eſteemed diſhonourable. In almoſt every ſort of knowledge there is a competition for ſuperiority. Intellectual attainments are never to be undervalued. Learning is the beſt human thing. All knowledge is excellent as far as it goes, and as long as it laſts. But how ſhort is the period before "tongues ſhall ceaſe and knowledge ſhall vaniſh away."

Shall we then eſteem it diſhonourable to be ignorant in any thing which relates to life and literature, to taſte and ſcience, and not feel aſhamed to live in ignorance of our own hearts?

To have a flouriſhing eſtate and a mind in diſorder; to keep exact accounts with a

Steward, and no reckoning with our Maker; to have an accurate knowledge of loſs or gain in our buſineſs, and to remain utterly ignorant whether our ſpiritual concerns are improving or declining; to be cautious in aſcertaining at the end of every year how much we have increaſed or diminiſhed our fortune, and to be careleſs whether we have incurred profit or loſs in faith and holineſs, is making a wretched eſtimate of the comparative value of things. To beſtow our attention on objects in direct oppoſition to their importance, is ſurely no proof that our learning has improved our judgment.

That deep thinker and acute reaſoner, Dr. Barrow, has remarked, that "it is a peculiar excellency of human nature, and which diſtinguiſhes man from the inferior creatures more than bare reaſon itſelf, that he can reflect upon all that is done within him, can diſcern the tendencies of his ſoul, and is acquainted with his own purpoſes."

This

This diſtinguiſhing faculty of ſelf-inſpection would not have been conferred on man, if it had not been intended that it ſhould be in habitual operation. It is ſurely, as we before obſerved, as much a common law of prudence to look well to our ſpiritual as to our worldly poſſeſſions. We have appetites to controul, imaginations to reſtrain, tempers to regulate, paſſions to ſubdue; and how can this internal work be effected, how can our thoughts be kept within due bounds, how can a proper bias be given to the affections, how can "the little ſtate of man" be preſerved from continual inſurrection, how can this reſtraining power be maintained, if this capacity of diſcerning, if this faculty of inſpecting be not kept in regular exerciſe? Without conſtant diſcipline, imagination will become an outlaw, conſcience an attainted rebel.

This inward eye, this power of introverſion is given us for a continual watch upon the ſoul. On an unremitted vigilance over its interior motions, thoſe fruitful ſeeds of

action,

action, thoſe prolific principles of vice and virtue will depend both the formation and the growth of our moral and religious character. A ſuperficial glance is not enough for a thing ſo deep, an unſteady view will not ſuffice for a thing ſo wavering, nor a caſual look for a thing ſo deceitful as the human heart. A partial inſpection on any one ſide, will not be enough for an object which muſt be obſerved under a variety of aſpects, becauſe it is always ſhifting its poſition, always changing its appearances.

We ſhould examine not only our conduct but our opinions; not only our faults but our prejudices, not only our propenſities but our judgments. Our actions themſelves will be obvious enough; it is our intentions which require the ſcrutiny. Theſe we ſhould follow up to their remoteſt ſprings, ſcrutinize to their deepeſt receſſes, trace through their moſt perplexing windings. And leſt we ſhould, in our purſuit, wander in uncertainty and blindneſs, let us make uſe of that guiding clue which the Almighty has

furniſhed by his word, and by his ſpirit, for conducting us through the intricacies of this labyrinth. "What I know not teach Thou me," ſhould be our conſtant petition in all our reſearches.

Did we turn our thoughts inward, it would abate much of the ſelf-complacency with which we ſwallow the flattery of others. Flattery hurts not him who flatters not himſelf. If we examined our motives keenly, we ſhould frequently bluſh at the praiſes our actions receive. Let us then conſcientiouſly enquire not only what we do, but whence and why we do it, from what motive and to what end.

Self-inſpection is the only means to preſerve us from ſelf-conceit. We could not ſurely ſo very extravagantly value a being whom we ourſelves ſhould not only ſee, but feel to be ſo full of faults. Self-acquaintance will give us a far more deep and intimate knowledge of our own errors than we can poſſibly have, with all the inquiſitiveneſs of an idle curioſity, of the errors of others. We are eager enough to blame them without knowing

knowing their motives. We are no leſs eager to vindicate ourſelves, though we cannot be entirely ignorant of our own. Thus two virtues will be acquired by the ſame act, humility and candour; an impartial review of our own infirmities, being the likelieſt way to make us tender and compaſſionate to thoſe of others.

Nor ſhall we be ſo liable to over-rate our own judgment when we perceive that it often forms ſuch falſe eſtimates, is ſo captivated with trifles, ſo elated with petty ſucceſſes, ſo dejected with little diſappointments. When we hear others commend our charity which we know is ſo cold; when others extol our piety which we feel to be ſo dead; when they applaud the energies of our faith, which we muſt know to be ſo faint and feeble; we cannot poſſibly be ſo intoxicated with the applauſes which never would have been given had the applauder known us as we know, or ought to know ourſelves. If we contradict him, it may be only to draw on ourſelves the imputation of a freſh virtue,

humility, which perhaps we as little deſerve to have aſcribed to us as that which we have been renouncing. If we kept a ſharp look-out, we ſhould not be proud of praiſes which cannot apply to us, but ſhould rather grieve at the involuntary fraud of impoſing on others, by tacitly accepting a character to which we have ſo little real pretenſion. To be delighted at finding that people think ſo much better of us than we are conſcious of deſerving, is in effect to rejoice in the ſucceſs of our own deceit.

We ſhall alſo become more patient, more forbearing and forgiving, ſhall better endure the harſh judgment of others reſpecting us, when we perceive that their opinion of us nearly coincides with our own real though unacknowledged ſentiments. There is much leſs injury incurred by others thinking too ill of us, than in our thinking too well of ourſelves.

It is evident then, that to live at random, is not the life of a rational, much leſs of an immortal, leaſt of all of an accountable being.

being. To pray occaſionally, without a deliberate courſe of prayer; to be generous without proportioning our means to our expenditure; to be liberal without a plan, and charitable without a principle; to let the mind float on the current of public opinion, lie at the mercy of events for the probable occurrence of which we have made no proviſion; to be every hour liable to death without any habitual preparation for it; to carry within us a principle which we believe will exiſt through all the countleſs ages of eternity, and yet to make little enquiry whether that eternity is likely to be happy or miſerable—all this is an inconſiderateneſs which, if adopted in the ordinary concerns of life, would bid fair to ruin a man's reputation for common ſenſe; yet of this infatuation he who lives without ſelf-examination is abſolutely guilty.

Nothing more plainly ſhews us what weak vacillating creatures we are, than the difficulty we find in fixing ourſelves down to the very ſelf-ſcrutiny we had deliberately reſolved

on. Like the worthleſs Roman Emperor, we retire to our cloſet under the appearance of ſerious occupation, but might now and then be ſurprized, if not in catching flies, yet in purſuits nearly as contemptible. Some trifle which we ſhould be aſhamed to dwell upon at any time, intrudes itſelf on the moments dedicated to ſerious thought; recollection is interrupted; the whole chain of reflection is broken, ſo that the ſcattered links cannot again be united. And ſo inconſiſtent are we that we are ſometimes not ſorry to have a plauſible pretence for interrupting the very employment in which we had juſt before made it a duty to engage. For want of this home acquaintance, we remain in utter ignorance of our inability to meet even the ordinary trials of life with cheerfulneſs; indeed by this neglect we confirm that inability.

Nurſed in the lap of luxury, we have perhaps an indefinite notion that we have but a looſe hold on the things of this world, and of the world itſelf.—But let ſome accident take away, not the world, but ſome

trifle

trifle on which we thought we ſet no value while we poſſeſſed it, and we find to our aſtoniſhment that we hold, not the world only, but even this trivial poſſeſſion with a pretty tight graſp. Such detections of our ſelf-ignorance, if they do not ſerve to wean, ought at leaſt to humble us.

There is a ſpurious ſort of ſelf-examination which does not ſerve to enlighten but to blind. A perſon who has left off ſome notorious vice, who has ſoftened ſome ſhades of a glaring ſin, or ſubſtituted ſome outward forms in the place of open irreligion, looks on his change of character with pleaſure. He compares himſelf with what he was, and views the alteration with ſelf-complacency. He deceives himſelf by taking his ſtandard from his former conduct, or from the character of ſtill worſe men, inſtead of taking it from the unerring rule of Scripture. He looks rather at the diſcredit than the ſinfulneſs of his former life, and being more aſhamed of what is diſreputable than grieved at what is vicious, he is, in this ſtate of ſhallow reformation, more in danger in proportion as he

is more in credit. He is not aware that it is not having a fault or two leſs will carry him to heaven, while his heart is ſtill glued to the world and eſtranged from God.

If we ever look into our hearts at all, we are naturally moſt inclined to it when we think we have been acting right. Here inſpection gratifies ſelf-love. We have no great difficulty in directing our attention to an object when that object preſents us with pleaſing images. But it is a painful effort to compel the mind to turn in on itſelf, when the view only preſents ſubjects for regret and remorſe. This painful duty however muſt be performed, and will be more ſalutary in proportion as it is leſs pleaſant. — Let us eſtabliſh it into a habit to ruminate on our faults. With the recollection of our virtues we need not feed our vanity. They will, if that vanity does not obliterate them, be recorded elſewhere.

We are alſo moſt diſpoſed to look at thoſe parts of our character which will beſt bear it, and which conſequently leaſt need it; at

thoſe

thoſe parts which afford moſt ſelf-gratulation. If a covetous man, for inſtance, examines himſelf, inſtead of turning his attention to the peccant part, he applies the probe where he knows it will not go very deep; he turns from his avarice to that ſobriety of which his very avarice is perhaps the ſource. Another, who is the ſlave of paſſion, fondly reſts upon ſome act of generoſity, which he conſiders as a fair commutation for ſome favorite vice, that would coſt him more to renounce than he is willing to part with. We are all too much diſpoſed to dwell on that ſmiling ſide of the proſpect which pleaſes and deceives us, and to ſhut our eyes upon that part which we do not chuſe to ſee, becauſe we are reſolved not to quit. Self-love always holds a ſcreen between the ſuperficial ſelf-examiner and his faults. The nominal Chriſtian wraps himſelf up in forms which he makes himſelf believe are religion. He exults in what he does, overlooks what he ought to do, nor ever ſuſpects that what is done at all can be done amiſs.

As we are ſo indolent that we ſeldom examine a truth on more than one ſide, ſo we generally take care that it ſhall be that ſide which ſhall confirm ſome old prejudices. While we will not take pains to correct thoſe prejudices and to rectify our judgment, leſt it ſhould oblige us to diſcard a favorite opinion, we are yet as eager to judge, and as forward to decide, as if we were fully poſſeſſed of the grounds on which a ſound judgment may be made, and a juſt deciſion formed.

We ſhould watch ourſelves whether we obſerve a ſimple rule of truth and juſtice, as well in our converſation, as in our ordinary tranſactions; whether we are exact in our meaſures of commendation and cenſure; whether we do not beſtow extravagant praiſe where ſimple approbation alone is due; whether we do not withhold commendation, where, if given, it would ſupport modeſty and encourage merit; whether what deſerves only a ſlight cenſure as imprudent, we do not reprobate as immoral; whether we do not ſometimes affect to over-rate ordinary merit,

merit, in the hope of ſecuring to ourſelves the reputation of candor, that we may on other occaſions, with leſs ſuſpicion, depreciate eſtabliſhed excellence. We extol the firſt becauſe we fancy that it can come into no competition with us, and we derogate from the laſt becauſe it obviouſly eclipſes us.

Let us aſk ourſelves if we are conſcientiouſly upright in our eſtimation of benefits; whether when we have a favour to aſk we do not depreciate its value, when we have one to grant we do not aggravate it?

It is only by ſcrutinizing the heart that we can know it. It is only by knowing the heart that we can reform the life. Any careleſs obſerver indeed, when his watch goes wrong, may ſee that it does ſo by caſting an eye on the dial plate; but it is only the artiſt who takes it to pieces and examines every ſpring and every wheel ſeparately, who, by aſcertaining the preciſe cauſes of the irregularity, can ſet the machine right, and reſtore the obſtructed movements.

The illuſions of intellectual viſion would be materially corrected by a cloſe habit of cultivating an acquaintance with our hearts. We fill much too large a ſpace in our own imaginations; we fancy we take up more room in the world than Providence aſſigns to an individual who has to divide his allotment with ſo many millions, who are all of equal importance in their own eyes; and who, like us, are elbowing others to make room for themſelves. Juſt as in the natural world, where every particle of matter would ſtretch itſelf and move out of its place, if it were not kept in order by ſurrounding particles: the preſſure of other parts reduces this to remain in a confinement from which it would eſcape, if it were not thus preſſed and acted upon on all ſides. The conſcientious practice we have been recommending, would greatly aſſiſt in reducing us to our proper dimenſions, and in limiting us to our proper place. We ſhould be aſtoniſhed if we could ſee our real diminutiveneſs, and the ſpeck we actually occupy. When ſhall we learn

learn from our own feelings of how much conſequence every man is to himſelf?

Nor muſt the examination be occaſional but regular. Let us not run into long arrears, but ſettle our accounts frequently. Little articles will run up to a large amount, if they are not cleared off. Even our *innocent* days, as we may chuſe to call them, will not have paſſed without furniſhing their contingent. Our deadneſs in devotion—our eagerneſs for human applauſe—our care to conceal our faults rather than to correct them—our negligent performance of ſome relative duty—our imprudence in converſation, eſpecially at table—our inconſideration—our driving to the very edge of permitted indulgences—let us keep theſe, let us keep all our numerous items in ſmall ſums. Let us examine them while the particulars are freſh in our memory, otherwiſe, however we may flatter ourſelves that leſſer evils will be ſwallowed up by the greater, we may find when we come to ſettle the grand account that they will not be

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the leſs remembered for not having been recorded.

And let it be one ſubject of our frequent enquiry, whether, ſince we laſt ſcrutinized our hearts, our ſecular affairs, or our eternal concerns, have had the predominance there. We do not mean which of them has occupied moſt of our time, the larger portion of which muſt, neceſſarily, to the generality, be abſorbed in the cares of the preſent life; but on which our affections have been moſt bent; and eſpecially how we have conducted ourſelves when there has ariſen a competition between the intereſts of both.

That general burſt of ſins which ſo frequently ruſhes in on the conſciences of the dying, would be much moderated by previous habitual ſelf-examination. It will not do to repent in the lump. The ſorrow muſt be as circumſtantial as the ſin. Indefinite repentance is no repentance. And it is one grand uſe of ſelf-inquiry, to remind us that all unforſaken ſins are unrepented ſins.

To

To a Chriſtian there is this ſubſtantial comfort attending a minute ſelf-examination, that when he finds fewer ſins to be noted and more victories over temptation obtained, he has a ſolid evidence of his advancement, which well repays his trouble.

The faithful ſcarcher into his own heart, that "chamber of Imagery," feels himſelf in the ſituation of the Prophet *, who being conducted in viſion from one idol to another, the ſpirit, at ſight of each, repeatedly exclaims, "here is another abomination!" The prophet being commanded to dig deeper, the further he penetrated the more evils he found, while the ſpirit continued to cry out, "I will ſhew thee yet more abominations."

Self-examination by detecting ſelf-love, ſelf-denial by weakening its powers, ſelf-government by reducing its deſpotiſm, turns the temper of the ſoul from its natural bias,

* Ezekiel.

controls

controls the diſorderly appetite, and, under the influence of Divine grace, in a good meaſure reſtores to the man that dominion over himſelf, which God at firſt gave him over the inferior creatures. Deſires, paſſions, and appetites are brought to move ſomewhat more in their appointed order, ſubjects not tyrants. What the Stoics vainly pretended to, Chriſtianity effects. It reſtores man to a dominion over his own will, and in a good meaſure enthrones him in that empire which he had forfeited by ſin.

He now begins to ſurvey his interior, the awful world within; not indeed with ſelf-complacency, but with the control of a Sovereign, he ſtill finds too much rebellion to indulge ſecurity, he therefore continues his inſpection with vigilance, but without perturbation. He continues to experience a remainder of inſubordination and diſorder, but this rather ſolicits to a ſtricter government than drives him to relax his diſcipline.

This ſelf-inſpection ſomewhat reſembles the correction of a literary performance.

After

After many and careful reviſals, though ſome groſſer faults may be done away; though the errors are neither quite ſo numerous, nor ſo glaring as at firſt, yet the critic perpetually perceives faults which he had not perceived before; negligences appear which he had overlooked, and even defects ſtart up which had paſſed on him for beauties. He finds much to amend, and even to expunge, in what he had before admired. When by rigorous caſtigation the moſt acknowleged faults are corrected, his critical acumen, improved by exerciſe, and a more habitual acquaintance with his ſubject, ſtill detects and will for ever detect new imperfections. But he neither throws aſide his work, nor remits his criticiſm, which, if it do not make the work perfect, will at leaſt make the author humble. Conſcious that if it is not quite ſo bad as it was, it is ſtill at an immeaſurable diſtance from the required excellence.

Is it not aſtoniſhing that we ſhould go on repeating periodically, "Try me, O God," while

while we are yet neglecting to try ourſelves? Is there not ſomething more like defiance than devotion to invite the inſpection of Omniſcience to that heart which we ourſelves neglect to inſpect? How can a Chriſtian ſolemnly cry out to the Almighty, "Seek the ground of my heart, prove me, and examine my thoughts, and ſee if there be any way of wickedneſs in me," while he himſelf neglects to "examine his heart," is afraid of "proving his thoughts," and dreads to enquire if there "be any way of wickedneſs" in himſelf, knowing that the enquiry ought to lead to the expulſion.

In our ſelf-inquiſition let us fortify our virtue by a rigorous exactneſs in calling things by their proper names. Self-love is particularly ingenious in inventing diſguiſes of this kind. Let us lay them open, ſtrip them bare, face them, and give them as little quarter as if they were the faults of another. Let us not call wounded pride delicacy. Self-love is made up of ſoft and ſickly ſenſibilities. Not that ſenſibility which melts at the

the ſorrows of others, but that which cannot endure the leaſt ſuffering itſelf. It is alive in every pore where ſelf is concerned. A touch is a wound. It is careleſs in inflicting pain, but exquiſitely awake in feeling it. It defends itſelf before it is attacked, revenges affronts before they are offered, and reſents as an inſult the very ſuſpicion of an imperfection.

In order then to unmaſk our hearts, let us not be contented to examine our vices, let us examine our virtues alſo, "thoſe ſmaller faults." Let us ſcrutinize to the bottom thoſe qualities and actions which have more particularly obtained public eſtimation. Let us enquire if they were genuine in the principle, ſimple in the intention, honeſt in the proſecution. Let us aſk ourſelves if in ſome admired inſtances our generoſity had no tincture of vanity, our charity no taint of oſtentation? Whether, when we did ſuch a right action which brought us credit, we ſhould have perſiſted in doing it had we foreſeen that it would incur cenſure?

Do

Do we never deceive ourſelves by miſtaking a conſtitutional indifference of temper for Chriſtian moderation? Do we never conſtrue our love of eaſe into deadneſs to the world? Our animal activity into Chriſtian zeal? Do we never miſtake our obſtinacy for firmneſs, our pride for fortitude, our ſelfiſhneſs for feeling, our love of controverſy for the love of God, our indolence of temper for ſuperiority to human applauſe? When we have ſtripped our good qualities bare; when we have made all due deductions for natural temper, eaſineſs of diſpoſition, ſelf-intereſt, deſire of admiration, when we have pared away every extrinſic appendage, every illegitimate motive, let us fairly caſt up the account, and we ſhall be mortified to ſee how little there will remain. Pride may impoſe itſelf upon us even in the ſhape of repentance. The humble Chriſtian is grieved at his faults, the proud man is angry at them. He is indignant when he diſcovers he has done wrong, not ſo much becauſe his ſin offends God, as becauſe it has let him ſee

that

that he is not quite ſo good as he had tried to make himſelf believe.

It is therefore more neceſſary to excite us to the humbling of our pride than to the performance of certain good actions; the former is more difficult as it is leſs pleaſant. That very pride will of itſelf ſtimulate to the performance of many things that are laudable. Theſe performances will reproduce pride as they were produced by it; whereas humility has no outward ſtimulus. Divine grace alone produces it. It is ſo far from being actuated by the love of fame, that it is not humility, till it has laid the deſire of fame in the duſt.

If an actual virtue conſiſts, as we have frequently had occaſion to obſerve, in the dominion over the contrary vice, humility is the conqueſt over pride, charity over ſelfiſhneſs, not only a victory over the natural temper, but a ſubſtitution of the oppoſite quality. This proves that all virtue is founded in ſelf-denial, ſelf-denial in ſelf-knowledge, and ſelf-knowledge in ſelf-examination. Pride ſo inſinuates itſelf in all we

do,

do, and ſay, and think, that our apparent humility has not ſeldom its origin in pride. That very impatience which we feel at the perception of our faults is produced by the aſtoniſhment at finding that we are not perfect. This ſenſe of our ſins ſhould make us humble but not deſperate. It ſhould teach us to diſtruſt every thing in ourſelves, and to hope for every thing from God. The more we lay open the wounds which ſin has made, the more earneſtly ſhall we ſeek the remedy which Chriſtianity has provided.

But inſtead of ſeeking for ſelf-knowledge, we are glancing about us for grounds of ſelf-exaltation. We almoſt reſemble the Phariſee, who with ſo much ſelf-complacency delivered in the catalogue of his own virtues and other men's ſins, and, like the Tartars, who think they poſſeſs the qualities of thoſe they murder, fancied that the ſins of which he accuſed the Publican would ſwell the amount of his own good deeds. Like him we take a few items from memory, and a few more from imagination. Inſtead of pulling down the edifice which pride has raiſed,

raiſed, we are looking round on our good works for buttreſſes to prop it up. We excuſe ourſelves from the imputation of many faults by alleging that they are common, and by no means peculiar to ourſelves. This is one of the weakeſt of our deceits. Faults are not leſs perſonally our's becauſe others commit them. Is it any diminution of our error that others are guilty of the ſame?

Self-love being a very induſtrious principle has generally two concerns in hand at the ſame time. It is as buſy in concealing our own defects as in detecting thoſe of others, eſpecially thoſe of the wiſe and good. We might indeed direct its activity in the latter inſtance to our own advantage, for if the faults of good men are injurious to themſelves, they might be rendered profitable to us, if we were careful to convert them to their true uſe. But inſtead of turning them into a means of promoting our own watchfulneſs, we employ them miſchievouſly in two ways. We leſſen our reſpect for pious characters when we ſee the infirmities

infirmities which are blended with their fine qualities, and we turn their failings into a juſtification of our own, which are not like theirs overſhadowed with virtues. To admire the excellences of others without imitating them is fruitleſs admiration, to condemn their errors without avoiding them is unprofitable cenſorioufneſs.

When we are compelled by our conſcience, to acknowledge and regret any fault we have recently committed, this fault ſo preſſes upon our recollection, that we ſeem to forget that we have any other. This ſingle error fills our mind, and we look at it as through a teleſcope, which, while it clearly ſhews the object, confines the ſight to that one object excluſively. Others indeed are more effectually ſhut out, than if we were not examining this. Thus while the object in queſtion is magnified, the others are as if they did not exiſt.

It ſeems to be eſtabliſhed into a kind of ſyſtem not to profit by any thing without us, and not to cultivate an acquaintance with

any thing within us. Though we are perpetually remarking on the defects of others, yet when does the remark lead us to ſtudy and to root out the ſame defects in our own hearts? We are almoſt every day hearing of the death of others, but does it induce us to reflect on death as a thing in which we have an individual concern? We conſider the death of a friend as a loſs, but ſeldom apply it as a warning. The death of others we lament, the faults of others we cenſure, but how ſeldom do we make uſe of the one for our own amendment, or of the other for our own preparation?*

It is the faſhion of the times to try experiments in the Arts, in Agriculture, in Philoſophy. In every ſcience the diligent profeſſor is always afraid there may be ſome ſecret which he has not yet attained, ſome occult principle which would reward the labour of diſcovery, ſomething even which

* For this hint, and a few others on the ſame ſubject, the Author is indebted to that excellent Chriſtian Moraliſt, M. Nicole.

when our ſpiritual enemy ceaſes to aſſail. We may be off our guard when there is no longer any temptation without. We may ceaſe our ſelf-denial when there is no more corruption within. We may give the reins to our imagination when we are ſure its tendencies will be towards heaven. We may diſmiſs repentance when ſin is aboliſhed. We may indulge ſelfiſhneſs when we can do it without danger to our ſouls. We may neglect prayer when we no longer need the favour of God. We may ceaſe to praiſe him when he ceaſes to be gracious to us.—To diſcontinue our vigilance at any period ſhort of this will be to defeat all the virtues we have practiſed on earth, to put to hazard all our hopes of happineſs in heaven.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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